



BY YOSHINO ORIGUCHI
ILLUSTRATED BY Z-ion

MONSTER GIRL DOCTOR





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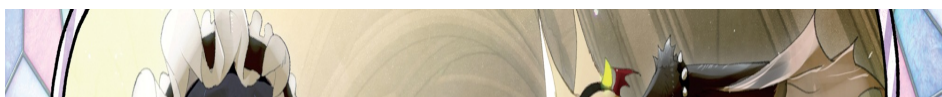
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MONSTER GIRL DOCTOR 7



BY YOSHINO ORIGUCHI
ILLUSTRATED BY Z-TON





Memé Radon

The cyclops
craftsman

Plum Murdrac

A 217-year-old
vampire

If you were in the Harvest
Festival Fashion Show...

Arhnia Tarantella
Arachnida

Gleamsnatche
juice

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The shepherd
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MONSTER GIRL DOCTOR

VOLUME

7

STORY BY

Yoshino Origuchi

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

Z-ton



Seven Seas Entertainment

MONSTER MUSUME NO OISHASAN VOLUME 7

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Prologue: Lindworm General Assembly

“I hereby announce the commencement of the general assembly,” Aluloona declared solemnly.

Skadi noted out of the corner of her eye how serious Aluloona’s face was in this situation, instead of her typical erotomania.

“The first topic of discussion is—oh. It’s Loose Silk Sewing. Well then, let’s begin the deliberations. Are you all prepared?”

“Yup.”

“Mmm. Now then...”

It was autumn in Lindworm.

The second semiannual election was complete. The council members hadn’t changed. The extraordinary Hephthal, leader of the centaurs, was there representing Scythia Transportation.

The elderly Claudette, who controlled the arachnes, was there representing Loose Silk Sewing.

Lindworm Central Hospital’s dean of medicine, Dr. Cthulhy, was there, but looked as if she was about to fall asleep from fatigue.

Skadi was also stifling a yawn.

Every single member of the council was exceptional. Under Aluloona, the town would run smoothly. But Skadi also had a firm grasp of the other council members’ personalities. Even if they went a bit wild, Skadi could control them all.

Which was why she was bored.

“Ahhhh...”

But when she yawned in the middle of a council meeting, no one batted an eye.

Even if such a thing were to be reported in the newspaper, the headline would read something like, “Is the Draconess Tired?” or “This Just In: The Draconess’s Yawn Is Quite Cute!”

Living long was dull.

Thanks to Dr. Glenn, Skadi had resolved to try enjoying life again, but she couldn't help but feel bored. She disliked conflict, but sailing on smooth waters every day was making her soft.

Everyone in the room would probably die before her.

Although she had resolved to address her ennui, she thought she should at least be allowed to yawn when she wanted to.

It was really rough when we were making this town. No one had been trained to run a city, and all our resources were in short supply.

The bored dragon began reminiscing about the past.

When she'd decided to build a city, she started by going to see the giant, Dione. She resolved the food situation by having Aluloona take care of agriculture. The undead were left in the care of the first-generation Molly, the hospital was entrusted to Cthulhy and her pupils, and so on.

Back then, Skadi had had to supervise every task. The fact that she could afford to yawn now was proof of how well things were going in the city, and she knew that, but she couldn't help but lament her longevity.

"Hmph. Has everyone presented their opinions? In that case, Claudette will make the final decision. Now, the next topic is—oh. Is this from the graveyard district?"

"We would like to explain!" someone said, raising their hand.

In the most recent election, someone new had been granted a seat on the council—second-generation Molly of the graveyard district. She looked to be in high spirits today, and her normally wandering eyes were fixed on Skadi.

"A proposal? Sure, go ahead."

"Thank you. We in the graveyard district would like to propose reinstating the harvest festival this autumn!"

"Oh, with the costumes...?"

The harvest festival had been started by the first-generation Molly as an annual tradition. It had been canceled the past few years for various reasons, and first-generation Molly had passed away before it was reinstated. Second-generation Molly, as the recipient of her bones,

clearly wanted to continue her predecessor's legacy.

"That sounds fun!"

"We can invite everyone on the continent! Our preliminary estimates predict a thirty percent increase in revenue! Therefore, according to the data we submitted—"

"Show me, Aluloona."

Aluloona used her vines to pass the documents to Skadi. The Draconess looked it over, nodding. It was a general outline of the harvest festival, and it was thorough.

But...

"Hey, quiet! Silence, everyone!"

Unsurprisingly, the council had begun chattering among themselves. Molly had forgotten something critical, which would be especially upsetting to monsters with strong traditions.

"Aluloona, can you put together a budget?"

"Sure, but...what should we do about *that*?"

"Yes. That is a problem. Hey, Molly, did you get Murdrac's permission?"

Molly stared back at her, blankly.

This was the reason the harvest festival hadn't been held in many years.

"The vampire lord. He's staying at your hotel."

"He's been there for a while, yeah. What about him?"

"We'll need his permission if we're going to do it. Otherwise, *Lord* Murdrac might throw a tantrum."

Murdrac hated the noise and commotion of festivals. His complaints had ultimately led to the cancellation of the harvest festival.

"But...he's just a guest at the hotel." Molly was confused. "Why do we need his permission on a city matter...?"

"Perhaps you're unaware, but Deadlich Hotel is the former manor of the Murdrac family. We're only borrowing it to use as a hotel. Not only is Lord Murdrac *not* a guest, he's the owner."

"No one told me that..."

“He doesn’t like to leave, and he’s not being paid for use of the manor. But he still holds the title deed. The whole graveyard district was formerly part of the Murdrac family estate.”

“Y-yes, that *was* the case, but now the graveyard district belongs to Lindworm. It’s an important tourist attraction. I propose that allowing the council to be swayed by someone without a seat on said council is a violation of our bylaws. If the council decides to hold the harvest festival, then we should be able to convince Lord Murdrac.”

“You have a point. Let’s hear everyone’s opinion,” Skadi said casually.

“Fine, then.” Aluloona took out her fan and pointed it at those seated. “I put it to the council. All in favor of going ahead with the harvest festival, even against the wishes of Lord Murdrac, raise a hand, tentacle, or other appendage.”

Those in favor were the minority, most of them monsters who favored an individualist approach. On the other hand—or tentacle, or other appendage—those who were seen as leaders among their species, such as Hephthal and Claudette, were opposed.

Such was the influence vampires wielded.

“As you know,” Skadi started, “Lord Murdrac is living in seclusion. But just because he isn’t actively participating in the politics of Lindworm, it doesn’t mean we can ignore his authority. Molly, if you would like to reinstate the harvest festival, get him on board.”

“Orders...understood.”

Molly was flustered at this unexpected response.

“Mmm. That will be all on this issue. Next...”

Skadi shook her tail as Aluloona plowed through the agenda.

She’d already told Molly that they couldn’t hold the festival without the vampire’s permission. However, as she recalled the lively harvest festivals of years past, she couldn’t help but get her hopes up.

“Costumes... Candy...” she said under her breath, her boredom all but vanishing.

The Draconess couldn’t wait to celebrate a proper harvest festival again.

Case 01: Insomniac Cyclops

Management Journal: Page 1

Day 1.

We're finally open.

I think I'm going to die. I want to die.

Why have I been put in charge of a branch store for the workshop? I can make products, but I can't sell them to people. This is impossible. What was the boss thinking?

Dad, Mom, come save me!

I want to go home.

No, no. I can't do that. I need to hang on. Arahnia helped me get the shop ready to open, and Lulala helped, too. I need to work hard.

I need to work hard...

Ah. Ah!

Ooh!

It's impossible!

The rest is scribbles.

The mansion was immense, with towering doors and vaulted ceilings. There were very few mansions in Lindworm, and this was the second time Glenn had set foot in this particular one. Since centaurs lived here, it was only natural that the building would feel huge to a human like him.

The man sitting in front of Glenn was huge, too.

"Thank you for taking the time to stop by, Glenn. I know an apprentice of Cthulhy must be very busy." Hephthal, the president of

Scythia Transportation, was dressed for business, but his formal suit couldn't quite contain the muscles beneath it. He also happened to be Tisalia's father.

"I-It's no problem. I heard it was urgent."

"Mm-hmm. I'll get right into it. I've heard through the grapevine...that you're engaged to my daughter."

Glenn froze.

Several days earlier, he'd gotten engaged to not one but *three* different monsters...of three different species, with three vastly different personalities: his childhood friend, the pharmacist Sapphee; the lady of the transportation company, Tisalia; and the clothing designer, Arahnia.

Once he and Tisalia were officially married, Hephthal would become Glenn's father-in-law.

"I-I'm so sorry. I haven't been able to properly ask for her hand."

"It couldn't be helped. With the poisoned water incident, I had my hands full, too. I've heard of your activities as a physician. It's more important to save lives. Although..." Hephthal paused. "My wife was livid."

"Y-your wife?"

"Yeah. She went off on me, saying she wouldn't allow Tisalia to marry a human. But my daughter said she wouldn't take over the business if we didn't bless the marriage. She and my wife actually sparred over it with practice swords, but no matter how long they fought, neither could beat the other."

"Did one of them finally give in?"

"Both practice swords broke first. In the end, I had to step in and talk my wife down." Hephthal chuckled, though Glenn didn't find it funny at all. "Well, after all that, both my wife and I have decided to accept you as our daughter's husband."

Glenn was sweating. It was hard to believe that after hearing such a story.

"We centaurs value martial prowess. Normally, it would be unfathomable to allow one of our own to marry a weak human."

Glenn couldn't reply.

"However, despite your frailty, you've resolved several issues in

Lindworm. I know you played a role in cleaning up both the sleeping disease caused by the Barometz tree and the poisoning of the Merrow Waterways, and you even treated the victims yourself. I consider that valuable, as well.”

“Th-thank you very much.”

This wasn’t the first time Glenn had met Hephthal. He’d visited this mansion before, when Tisalia was bedridden after contracting the sleeping disease. Glenn remembered that, during his examination, Hephthal and his wife, Kimmeria, had begged Glenn from the bottom of their hearts to take care of her. The Scythias hadn’t been so distraught only because she was their sole heir—they truly loved their daughter.

“Unlike many in our clan, you have power that you can exert intellectually. That’s one weapon that the Scythia have lacked in the mercenary trade for ages. And so...” Hephthal pierced Glenn with his sharp-eyed gaze. “I would like you to prove your intellect to me one more time.”

“Sorry?”

“Based on the result, I will officially give you my blessing to marry my daughter. Neither my wife nor subordinates will be able to object. What do you say?”

“Well, I mean...”

Glenn’s suspicions were right. Hephthal *wasn’t* ready to accept their engagement that easily. Perhaps it was actually *him*, and not his wife, who’d grown livid and sparred with Tisalia.

“What exactly do you mean by ‘proving my intellect’?”

“My company is currently facing a dilemma. I’m sure you have no intention of taking over the business, but if you’re going to be Tisalia’s husband, then it will certainly be a part of your life. That’s why I want you to resolve this...business issue.”

Hephthal’s words were like a heavy blow to Glenn’s chest.

Tisalia would someday take over Scythia Transportation. That was why she was looking for a capable suitor in the first place...and why she’d been eyeing Glenn. But it would be nearly impossible for Glenn to continue his work as a doctor while managing a transportation business.

Tisalia had told Glenn he didn’t need to be involved, but...

“You know Deadlich Graveyard City?”

“Uh...y-yes.”

It was a residential district in the northern part of Lindworm, where zombies, skeletons and ghosts lived.

“The second-generation manager is trying to reinstate the harvest festival that used to be held here. However, a vampire residing in Deadlich’s hotel—Lord Murdrac—is against it.”

“Lord Murdrac...”

“As a human, you might not know of him, but he’s famous among monsters. He’s very powerful, even for a vampire, and the hotel was originally the Murdrac family’s summer home. He generally doesn’t interact with other species, and doesn’t involve himself in politics, but when he does, well...most monsters can’t seem to say ‘no’ to Murdrac.”

Glenn tilted his head to one side in confusion. He’d thought there was no real social hierarchy between the monster races of Lindworm, a place where everyone came together to live as they wished. They might argue from time to time, but mostly, they cooperated with each other. Glenn had never heard of a monster exerting that kind of control over other monsters.

“We’ve had a hard enough time rallying our own species.” Hephthal laughed self-deprecatingly. “Not everyone in our clan is willing to cooperate. Eventually, with the help of monsters possessing authority, longevity, and strength—that is, dragons and vampires—we were able to unite. But the truth is...it was the Murdrac family that granted the Scythia clan authority to govern the other centaurs.”

“O-oh.”

“The same is true for many of the monsters with city council seats. They received the support of the rest of their species because of Lord Murdrac’s endorsement. Being taken under a dragon’s wing is quite rare, but vampires are much more likely to deal with other monsters.”

Glenn was finally starting to understand. “Um...you said that you have an issue with the company?”

“Yes.”

“Is that because Lord Murdrac opposes the harvest festival, but you—no, your company—would profit from the festival?”

“That is precisely correct. We prefer not to make Lord Murdrac angry. However, our transportation capabilities will be required for festival preparations. From our point of view, it’s an important opportunity. That’s why I’d like to ask for your help.”

Hephthal offered a smile, but Glenn couldn’t muster one to match it.

“I want you to arrange it so that the harvest festival will be held *without* offending Lord Murdrac.”

“N-no, wait. I’m just a doctor...”

“I understand if you want to refuse. The other option would be to win my daughter’s hand in single combat, as is the centaur tradition.”

Hephthal stood up. One of the buttons on his suit popped open, exposing his chiseled pecs. The battle-hardened aura of authority he exuded was...intimidating.

There was no way Glenn would ever stand a chance against him in a contest of strength.

“Err...”

He was looking at a father who wouldn’t give up his daughter without a fight.

However, Glenn thought. A harvest festival in the graveyard city means that Molly is serious about developing Lindworm’s tourism industry. It could really liven things up, boost the economy...and also encourage romantic encounters.

“I understand,” Glenn said quickly, hoping to calm Hephthal, who looked like he was itching to fight. “I’ll do what I can.”

“Well then, best of luck! As you said, it isn’t exactly in the job description of town doctor.”

“It would please me greatly if I could help make the harvest festival happen,” Glenn replied. He meant what he said—but it wasn’t the whole truth.

“I’ll leave it to you.”

“I’ll do what I can, but I’m not sure how effective I’ll be...”

“Where there’s a will, there’s a way. You wield your knowledge the way we centaurs wield our spears. I want to see how sharp that weapon is.” Hephthal grinned broadly. “I know you’ll come through...”

son.” The smile didn’t even approach his eyes.

Glenn had had some idea of what it meant to marry Tisalia, but he hadn’t been prepared at all for the biggest obstacle—her parents.

“Does that mean I have your blessing?”

“Yes.”

“Unbelievable, Doctor!”

It was a normal day in Lindworm, and Glenn was walking down the main road with Sapphee, the lamia who worked as his assistant... and also happened to be his fiancée. She seemed conflicted. The reason, of course, was that Glenn had told her what Hephthal had asked of him.

“I mean, the harvest festival does seem fun, but...”

The town was bustling. Every year, when autumn came along, the Aluloona Plantation hired a large number of temporary workers. The pay was quite high, so anyone skilled in physical labor helped with the harvest to supplement their income. The point of the harvest festival was to celebrate this abundance and prepare for the coming winter. It would be held in the graveyard district, which was located far from the Plantation, in the quiet, northern part of the city.

“But how will you convince Lord Murdrac? His family goes way back in the annals of monster history. They’ve been around far longer than the Neikes or Scythia clans.”

“So, you know about this vampire aristocrat, too, Sapphee?”

“Yes. There was a time when the lamia were also under the protection of famous vampire houses. Back then, people still believed we drank the blood of babies, as was written in the old texts.”

So...the Murdrac family was powerful even among vampires. Glenn knew nothing of this, having grown up in the human realm. Still, he was impressed that there were families that simply gave authority to other species, without taking center stage.

“Why doesn’t he ever go outside? Because he’s nocturnal?”

“Apparently, he doesn’t do well in the sunlight. Vampires have

many of the same characteristics as bats, after all.”

“Yeah...” Glenn only knew what he’d read in books. He’d never actually *seen* a vampire. Naturally, he was curious.

Sapphee slithered along beside him. “Molly’s worried about convincing him, too. Preparations for the festival are already underway. They’re already harvesting crops down at Aluloona Plantation, and Arahnia has all four of her hands full making costumes. But if we don’t have Lord Murdrac’s permission...”

“Then all that work will go to waste?”

“That’s not all. Many monsters have taken Murdrac’s side. This could divide Lindworm in two.” Sapphee explained the worst-case scenario, her eyes downcast.

Skadi had pulled the city together, but a wide variety of monsters were represented on the city council, all possessing different priorities and loyalties. And there was no telling how fragile that unity might be.

“If it gets really bad, it could affect the economy and disrupt people’s work.”

“I’ll figure something out.”

“Are you a master politician like Souen, Dr. Glenn?”

“Uhh...”

Glenn held his head in his hands. Something like this would be no problem for his brother, but it wasn’t easy for him. The only thing Glenn was good at was medicine.

Still, he didn’t regret taking this on.

“Ohh, we’ve arrived, Doctor.” Sapphee stopped in front of a sign on the main road.

Glenn pushed thoughts of festivals and vampires out of his mind for the time being and looked at the sign. *Kuklo Accessory Shop* was scrawled across it. Flowers were arranged next to the door, commemorating the opening.

“Yeah, this is definitely the place. Hello?”

“Eeee?!”

As Glenn stepped into the store, he was greeted with a shriek—not exactly a traditional greeting from a store clerk to a pair of customers.

“Ah, oh. Doctor, Sapphee...you scared me.”

It was a small but well-furnished shop; half workspace, half sales floor. In the center of the workspace, among the various tools and materials, stood a girl with one big eye. It was the Kuklo Workshop’s apprentice artisan, Memé Redon.

“Hey, Memé. We were so surprised to hear you’d been put in charge of your own shop at such a young age. We had to see it for ourselves.”

“I-I’m more surprised than you! A-and this shop is just to sell the pieces made in the workshop. It’s not my shop. Err, I don’t know what the boss is thinking, either... I can’t run a shop. It’s impossible for me!” Memé pounded something on an anvil while she muttered to herself. Apparently, she’d expanded the workspace so that she could make new accessories while minding the store.

“That’s still amazing, Memé. You’ve been entrusted with all this responsibility!”

“Errr...”

Glenn chuckled at Memé’s stressed-out groaning. The cyclopes boss and other workers had to have high expectations for her, though Memé might not have the mental fortitude to deal with that pressure yet.

The accessories on display featured a wide range of designs. Glenn looked at a ring, noticing a sign that explained the size could be adjusted. Memé’s aesthetic sensibilities were apparent in every piece.

Sapphee’s eyes shone as she looked at the items, her focus momentarily pulled away from Glenn.

“S-so then...why are you here?”

“We came to see you, of course. We wanted to congratulate you on the shop.”

“Th-thank you.”

With one eye on Sapphee, Glenn pulled out the envelope he’d prepared in advance and handed it to Memé. Memé tilted her head to the side, confused by Glenn’s secretive movements.

“Hmm?”

Then, she figured it out. She nodded fervently and hid the

envelope under her worktable.

“Doctor, this ring was made in collaboration with Loose Silk Sewing—hey, what’s going on?” This time, it was Sapphee who tilted her head, sensing that the other two were keeping something from her.

“Hmm? It’s nothing. Sapphee, don’t forget...we’re here to celebrate Memé.”

“I know. That’s exactly why we should buy something.”

Sapphee was visibly excited—her tail was literally wagging. Glenn was a little worried she might knock over one of the shelves. He could tell by the way her eyes darted around the items on sale that they were good quality, and the tools lined up at the counter were brand new, too. Maybe the boss and the others had made them for their apprentice’s big moment in the spotlight.

“Hmm...”

One thing concerned Glenn, though. The dark circle under Memé’s eye had deepened, and her face was pale. The cyclopes girl normally had a poor complexion, but it was especially bad today.

As a doctor, he couldn’t help but notice these sorts of abnormalities immediately.

“Is this new work hard on you?” Memé wasn’t used to serving customers.

“I-It’s *really* hard. I’ve never done any of this before! But I even learned how to make merrow glass for the shop! I’m not going to let everything I’ve learned go to waste.”

“Wow, that’s great. Not everyone can get a license to manufacture merrow glass!”

In the southern part of the monster realm lay an island. It was said that the current surrounding it was too treacherous for even the most experienced sailors to navigate. Only aquatic monsters, like mermaids, could visit.

It wasn’t long before the mermaid who owned the island came up with a lucrative business plan. She gathered glassworkers and started production, creating unique and exquisite glassware. Since no ships could reach the island unless they were towed by mermaids, their secret techniques were safe from theft. However, the mermaids couldn’t make the glass themselves because their bodies couldn’t stand the heat of the

furnaces.

Eventually, the island fell into ruin. However, the mermaids continued to pass down the glass techniques orally. They would train select craftsmen, granting them permission to make high-quality merrow glass products. That was why the Waterways were famous for their glass.

And now, Memé had somehow mastered this glass production method. She was honestly too skilled to be called an apprentice. At this stage, most would consider her an independent craftsman. She must have worked incredibly hard.

“I-I also made, um, sake glasses. Y-you should try them...”

“A sake set!” Sapphee’s eyes lit up, but Glenn was more concerned for Memé.

“Memé, you look like you need to get some rest. Are you sure you’re not working too hard?”

“I-I *do* need sleep! But it’s not because I’m making things...” Memé glanced at the entrance of the shop with her one big eye. “I-I get some weird customers.”

“Weird...customers?”

“One guy comes in with a big black overcoat and hood! Even though it’s only fall! He hides his face with tinted glasses. It’s totally suspicious! He’s come in several times since we opened, so I always have to be on the lookout.”

“Tinted glasses...”

This puzzled Glenn.

He’d heard of glasses with some dark pigment mixed into the lenses for shading. But glasses were already a luxury item, and considering the cost of such added processing... He remembered that Sapphee, who had a low tolerance for light, had once wanted a pair of those glasses, but abandoned the idea once she saw the price.

“Were they after your jewelry, perhaps?”

“When they already have expensive eyewear?”

An owner of such a luxury item probably didn’t need to worry about money. Though maybe they’d gotten rich selling items they stole...

“A-anyway, the patrol team has increased their patrols around here. Sioux comes by often.”

“The coast is clear, Me—Hey...Brother and Sister?”

As if summoned by the mere mention of her name, Sioux appeared in the shop. She’d been gaining lots of experience with the patrol team, and was putting everything she had into her work as a protector of the city.

“Sioux has not seen the person with a big overcoat, as you described.”

“They come at all different times...ahhh. What if my accessories are stolen? The boss will be so mad...ahhh!”

Glenn thought to himself that the boss would be more worried about Memé’s safety in such a scenario, but...

“This is why I can’t sleep at night!”

“But isn’t the store closed at night?”

“I’m still so worried I can’t sleep!”

So, she had insomnia. It was just like Memé to lose sleep over a suspicious customer rather than her work.

“Well, Brother, you needn’t worry! Sioux is here.”

“Y-yes...”

Glenn was still more concerned about Memé’s well-being, though the protection of the patrol team might assuage her anxiety. “Memé, you need to sleep.”

“I-I know. I-It’s okay. I can sleep. I’m sure I can...”

Watching Memé continue to work while muttering to herself only made Glenn more worried. She was already the kind to fret over small things, and her boss had probably entrusted her with this work to help her overcome that.

“Now then, let’s buy something to get Memé started,” Sapphee said.

“Th-thank you!”

Sapphee bought a small item she had been eyeing. The price was fair, and the quality of the work was incomparable. It wouldn’t be long before this shop became a hot spot. But Glenn remained concerned

about Memé's anxiety. It always seemed to simmer just below the surface, but it was more noticeable than usual, today.

"I-I promise to work hard..." Memé said, looking Glenn in the eye. She was probably doing that because of the envelope he'd slipped her earlier.

Glenn returned the look, saying nothing.

Sapphee cocked her head to the side, wondering what this meant.

"Memé's shop is already popular," Tisalia said.

Today, instead of sparring, she was pulling packages—helping with the transportation business. The work clearly wasn't urgent, because she was taking her time. She'd run into Glenn as he was walking home from his rounds for the day. They were both heading in the same direction, so they walked together.

"Even *I*'ve heard about the person in the coat. Lindworm is a safe place, so it's rare to come across a blatantly suspicious stranger. I wonder who they are."

"Yeah, I don't know..."

It was hard to believe that someone in a large overcoat, hiding their face, could exist in the safe trade and tourism city of Lindworm.

"I wanted to buy something, too, but Memé didn't look well at all. I hope she feels better soon."

"Oh, so you've been there already?"

"I wanted to find something for the wedding!" Tisalia said, proudly.

She really didn't waste any time. Glenn's clinic was still in debt to the city council and the central hospital. Even though he'd been given preferential terms for the loan, he wanted to take care of those liabilities before he was wed. He'd already told his fiancées as much.

And yet...both Sapphee and Tisalia were already acting as if they were married. Whereas Arahnia was acting more like a mistress than a fiancée.

"I've been meaning to ask you, did my father request a favor from you?"

“Er, yes.”

“You can refuse in the future. My parents aren’t in favor of our marriage, but I keep telling them all about how wonderful you are. If they still won’t accept you, then I’ll just leave home.”

According to Lindworm’s laws, only the consent of the two parties marrying was required. However, Tisalia’s species had many traditions. They expected a lot from a man who married an only daughter—especially one who’d previously been uninterested in taking over the family business. That was probably why Tisalia had been helping out more of late; she’d probably made up her mind to inherit the company if it smoothed the way for her and Glenn. He’d heard she was even studying accounting with Kay and Lorna.

“No, there’s no need for that.”

“B-but...”

“I just need to figure out how to fulfill the favor Hephthal asked of me. It seems like that will be enough for him to accept me as your husband.” Glenn didn’t want Tisalia to throw away everything she held dear just to marry him. He would simply have to prove his worth.

“Doctor...I am very grateful.”

“We’re in this together. You just worry about your studies.”

“Errr...” Tisalia groaned, closing her eyes. It wasn’t that she wasn’t smart, just that math was a stumbling block for her. “A-anyway, what did my father ask you to do?”

“Oh, you didn’t hear? Umm...” Glenn wondered how he should explain.

If he told her, Tisalia would probably want to help him. But he wondered if that would go against her father’s wishes. The fact that Hephthal hadn’t told her the details of his request made Glenn think he wanted him to resolve it on his own.

“I’ll...tell you about it later.” He decided to avoid the subject for now.

“Oh.”

“And I need to be getting back to the clinic...”

Just as Glenn was trying to extricate himself from the conversation, they noticed a crowd of people up ahead—a mob,

arguing. Sensing something out of the ordinary, Glenn strained his ears to hear.

It sounded like someone had been run over.

“Doctor!” someone called from the crowd.

“Y-yes?”

Before Glen could respond further, however, the ears on the top of Tisalia’s head perked up. She dropped her cargo and began trotting toward the crowd.

“What is it?” Glenn asked, running to keep up with her.

But he saw it before he got his answer.

In the center of the crowd was a carriage that had crashed into a gas lamp—a carriage belonging to Scythia Transportation. The centaur who’d been driving it caught sight of Tisalia and his face lit up in gratitude.

“Pr-Princess...you came all the way out here?”

“I was just passing by. Are you hurt?!”

“W-well, I didn’t have anyone riding with me, and *I’m* not hurt, but the girl...”

When they looked closer, there she was—hiding in the shadow of the carriage. It was Memé, wearing a dazed look on her face, like she didn’t know exactly what had happened.

“She just wandered into the street! I-I tried to avoid her...”

“Memé!”

“Are you hurt?” Glenn checked her over. She didn’t have any obvious injuries.

“D-Doctor, I...” Memé clearly wasn’t sure what was going on.

“Well, it looks like you’re all right. But I’d like to give you a proper examination, just to be sure. Is there anyone else who may have been hurt?!”

Glenn scanned the crowd. It looked like the other passersby were okay. The carriage driver must have been quite skilled.

“We’re close to your shop, Memé. Doctor, please take her there! The accident involved one of our company’s carriages, so I need to stay here and sort things out.”

“Th-thank you, that helps!” Glenn said to Tisalia as he helped the bewildered looking Memé stand up. The dark circle under her eye was even deeper than before.

“Okay, okay, start clearing out! This isn’t a show! Has someone contacted the patrol team?”

Glenn left the scene of the accident in the hands of Tisalia and quickly headed to Memé’s shop.

“Memé, you’re lucky that I happened to be passing by.”

In the back of the store, behind the counter and past the work area, was a small room for napping. Glenn had Memé lie down there. He gave orders to the fairy hiding in his pocket to go get Sapphee.

“You were just in an accident. Are you all right?”

“I’m okay... Just...a little off...”

Memé’s eye was vacant. Her head swayed from side to side. She was blissfully unaware of how much danger she’d been in only moments ago.

“Th-the thief might c-come here! I need to protect the store! That weird customer... See, there!”

“Memé, the strange customer isn’t here.”

“Th-they’ll come! They come, day and night...”

“Doctor...” Sapphee had appeared. She looked at Glenn, worry in her eyes.

Glenn scratched his head. Memé was drifting in and out of consciousness, and it sounded like she was hallucinating.

“There’s no doubt this is severe insomnia.” He sighed. He should have done something sooner. Judging by her current state, the strange customer might have been nothing more than a hallucination.

Memé opened her massive eye, but she seemed unable to focus on anything.

“If the symptoms are this bad, it must have been a long time since she’s slept.”

"I-It's true I haven't been sleeping, but...I'm fine! See! See, Doctor! I'm great! I can run the store, no problem!"

"No, you can't. Your life is at stake." Glenn pushed Memé back down on the bed, still annoyed with himself.

"I had a look around the store," Sapphee said. "There's a bunch of new items on display. Did you work all night, Memé?"

"Y-yes, b-but only because I couldn't sleep."

"Unbelievable..." Sapphee took something from her bag, looking similarly annoyed. It was a vial with a dropper. There was a picture of a sheep on the label.

"Eeee! Wh-what is that?!"

"It's medicine. It works very well. Doctor, I can give this to her, right?"

Glenn nodded.

The eyedrops were made from the extract of the Barometz trees growing on the plantation. The sleeping sickness caused by those same trees had infected people indiscriminately, but Sapphee had discovered a way to control its effects. Come to think of it—Glenn recalled that Memé was the only one in the workshop who hadn't succumbed to the illness and fallen asleep. She'd probably always suffered from insomnia.

"If you use these eyedrops, you'll be able to sleep. Just...try not to think too much. Once you get some rest, you'll feel better."

"E-errr...okay."

Sapphee filled the dropper. Since the cyclopes' eye was so big, this would take many more drops than usual.

"Now, Memé, hold still... There."

Drip.

Whoosh.

Splash.

"Ummm..."

Before the drop from the vial reached her eye, Memé moved so quickly that it was hard to believe she was weak from sleep-deprivation. The medicine fell onto the pillow instead.

Memé looked embarrassed.

“U-ummm...Memé, it won't work if you get out of the way...”

“I-I know.”

“Of course you do. Okay then, one more time. It's okay, as soon as it's in your eye, you'll be able to sleep.”

Drip.

Whomp.

Splash.

“Memé?”

“I-I know! I know I shouldn't move out of the way!”

“But you are.”

“M-my body just...”

Memé wasn't consciously moving, but she was still too quick for Glenn. It was natural to have an instinctive revulsion to eyedrops; the eyes were vulnerable areas for most living creatures. Since cyclops had such large eyes, it was arguably even scarier for them.

“Memé. It's important for you to recover, first and foremost, so you can keep up the shop. I know it's scary, but you don't need to worry about Sapphee's medicine. Please, trust us.”

“O-okay. I'll try!” Memé balled both of her hands into fists.

“Good. Now, look at Sapphee again so she can drop them in.”

Squirt.

It had happened again.

A large stain was forming on the pillow bed. Memé herself looked surprised that she'd dodged again, her lip quivering. Sapphee was smiling, but Glenn knew her well enough to guess that she was seething inside.

“Do you know how long it took me to extract this medicine you're wasting?”

“I-I'm not doing it on purpose! Believe me, Sapphee!”

“Yes, I know. Of *course* I know that, but...”

“Agggh?!”

Sapphee suddenly seized Memé with her tail. The cyclops screamed bloody murder as the lamia coiled around her, holding her

down.

“Doctor, let’s get those eyedrops in.”

“Eeeee! Y-you’re gonna kill me!”

“I’m telling you, this is all part of the treatment!”

Memé was struggling to wriggle free, but Sapphee kept a tight hold.

“Okay, ummm... If there’s no other way...” Glenn gave orders to the fairies to further restrain Memé.

“Wh-why are you tying me up?!”

“Because you keep running away!”

The fairies found a rope nearby and began wrapping it around her. For some reason, they ran the rope above, below, and between her breasts, making Memé’s chest seem bigger. Normally, due to her formidable strength, Memé would have been able to split the rope in two, but she was sleep-deprived and confused, and it looked like she’d forgotten her own abilities.

“I don’t want eyedrops! Please, there must be another way!”

“You sure yell loud, for someone so exhausted...”

Sapphee looked like a snake about to devour a rat. She must have been really upset about her medicine going to waste. She used the bottom half of her body to lift Memé’s chin.

“S-Sapphee, be gentle...”

“I *am* being gentle. You just worry about the medicine, Doctor.”

“Y-yes. Got it.”

Memé’s face was covered in tears and snot. The medicine was already half gone. Sapphee didn’t have any more once it ran out. All the more reason to get the treatment right...and also for Memé’s sake.

“Eeek!”

“Okay, okay. Now open your eye.”

“Uhh...”

Trembling, Memé made herself open her eye. She looked up at the ceiling. Glenn was sure it would work this time. He tipped the vial to drip the medicine into Memé’s eye and—

“Argh!”

Splash.

Although Memé couldn’t move, she could still close her eyelid, and she had. Instead of landing in her eye, the medicine had splashed over the top half of her body.

“Memé!”

“I-I can’t control my eye...”

Glenn understood. Memé knew that she needed this treatment, but that didn’t mean she could control her body’s involuntary reactions.

“Memé, listen. Look up at the ceiling again. Good.”

“Ee...garg... Agggh!”

Splash. Splash. Splaaash.

“Ergh...”

“I-I can do it. I’ll try harder... Argh. Eee... Eee...!”

Splash. Splash.

They weren’t getting anywhere.

No matter what Glenn tried—even coming in from the side instead of above—Memé closed her eyelid just in time, every time. The medicine just couldn’t get in.

“Hmmm...”

“This is a problem.”

After all these failed attempts, Memé was a complete mess. Her face was soaked in medication, but the tears constantly spilling from her eye kept the medication from getting in there. There was no sign that the drops were taking effect.



The medication soaked her clothes, her voluptuous chest hardly contained by her shirt. Because of her job, she was clad in light, breathable work clothes, and the shape of her breasts showed through clearly.

“Ewww... I’m all wet! Gross...”

“It’s because you’re so stubborn!”

“It’s not on purpose!”

The medication was almost gone. They couldn’t afford to waste even one more drop.

“D-Doctor! Sapphee! Isn’t there any other way? Can’t I just take some oral medicine?”

“This isn’t suitable for ingestion. This medicine was originally extracted from the Barometz, with the indiscriminate sleeping effects removed. It works through mucous membranes. So, ummm...the only other option is down there...”

“Down there?”

“Yes, human and cyclops women have two, ah, orifices. I’m talking about the one not used to make children.”

“Make children—huh?! N-no way! Impossible, I can’t do that!”

“I figured.”

Things were getting graphic. Sapphee was starting to grow desperate to get this over with. She knew better than anyone that this medicine was *meant* to go in the eyes. Glenn had to be joking about the other orifice...wasn’t he?

“Uhhh... I-I knew I couldn’t handle running my own store...” Memé began weeping even more bitterly. “The pressure from the boss... the weird customers... I’m just causing problems for my teacher and everyone else. I... I...!”

“Memé...” Glenn frowned at Memé’s wailing. “Memé. Hey.”

“Waaah...”

“Sorry about this.”

“Huh? Mrrgh?!”

Glenn thrust his hand into Memé’s mouth.

“Mmm! Mrgh! Mbbw!”

“It’s okay.” Glenn showed no mercy. He forced his finger to the back of her throat.

“Mggw! Rggw!”

“D-Doctor, that’s a little extreme.” Sapphee was getting anxious, too.

Glenn seemed unbothered by the fact that his finger was covered in Meme’s saliva. He used his other hand to grab the medicine vial.

“Mgggw!” Memé’s eye went wide in surprise.

Without missing a beat, Glenn applied the drops. Memé didn’t have time to close her eyelid, before the medicine spread all across her eyeball.

Glenn immediately removed his hand from her mouth.

“Hmm...”

“Argh! Oh...blech.”

“Memé, I know it’s rough, but you need to get some proper sleep. Eating and sleeping are the foundation of good health. If you aren’t doing those things, there’s no way you’ll be able to handle anything else,” Glenn warned.

Memé gagged a few times, but it wasn’t long before the medicine took effect. Her big eye rolled up, and her eyelid closed.

“Good. Perfect. Fairies, untie her.”

The fairies surrounded Memé and got to work. Glenn let out an exasperated sigh. The medicine made from the Barometz was highly effective, thanks to Sapphee’s pharmaceutical skills.

“That was quite an ordeal for just one dose of eyedrops.”

“Yes. It was rough on her, but there was no other way.” Sticking his finger down Memé’s throat to force her eye open wasn’t exactly a recommended technique, but it had been necessary. Glenn was sorry to have put her through that.

“I’m going to change her clothes. Please leave the room, Doctor.”

“Oh, right. She’s all wet...”

Memé’s break room was a mess. The eyedrops had splashed everywhere. The medication was tasteless and odorless, so it wasn’t that

big of a deal, but they still had to do something about the wet clothing and sheets.

“I’ll need one fairy to help me,” said Glenn. “And we should notify the workshop.”

Sapphee picked up the sleeping Memé with her tail. The cyclops’s face was finally peaceful.

“Sleep well, Memé.”

Memé let out a little snort, as if responding to Sapphee.

“Until then, Doctor will watch shop?” the fairy asked.

“Uhh, no... I don’t think so...” Glenn muttered back. “But at the very least, we need to put the ‘closed’ sign out.”

The fairy flapped its wings busily. Glenn wished there was a better way they could communicate.

He went outside.

The shop faced the main road. Given how important this new business was to the Kuklo Workshop for showcasing their techniques, Glenn understood why their expectations for Memé had been so high. But it was that same pressure that had broken her.

“Hmm...?”

Glenn sensed someone standing behind him as he hung the “closed” sign on the door.

He turned to see a person walking along the road, clad in a hood and overcoat. A pair of black-tinted glasses obscured the person’s face from view. Could this be the strange customer Memé had been talking about? *So...she wasn’t hallucinating?*

He’d been convinced that she was seeing things because of her sleep deprivation and anxiety.

But she’d been telling the truth.

Aside from their clothing, there wasn’t anything particularly odd about this stranger. They weren’t acting suspiciously, and they clearly weren’t worried about being seen. Because of their tinted glasses, though, Glenn couldn’t tell where they were looking.

The person seemed most interested in the sign Glenn had just put on the door.

Glenn was puzzled.

He thought about approaching them, but just then—

“I found them!” Sioux’s assertive voice preceded a red figure tackling the stranger.

This sudden arrest in broad daylight caught the attention of the other townsfolk. The person in the overcoat was actively struggling, but they were no match for Sioux’s strength.

“Hey...what are you...?!”

“Calm down! Sioux will not allow you to steal anything from Memé’s store!”

“What?! I’m not a thief!”

Glenn ran up to the duo. It looked like Sioux was getting violent, so he thought it was time for him to intervene.

“Let us start by viewing your face!” Sioux forcefully pulled the hood off the stranger’s head, exposing some sort of black cloth, which, upon closer inspection, looked more like claws.

Claws. With webbing spread between them.

They were bat wings.

“Wait, Sioux. This is a misunderstanding!” Glenn put his hand on Sioux’s shoulder to calm her down.

“But Brother!” Sioux let go of the stranger. “These clothes mean they don’t want people to know who they are! That is obviously suspicious! They might want to steal—”

“No, I think this person is—”

The stranger let out a sigh. Then they took off their tinted glasses.

“Hmph! Just because you can all move about freely during the day...! Do you know how many nocturnal monsters there are?! Ugh! If only the accessory shop was open at night, too!”

The bat girl had bright blonde hair that contrasted with her brown skin. She looked about the same age as Memé. Without her hood, her ears popped straight up. But her most distinct features were the webbed wings that stretched out from her elbows, exactly like bat wings.

So, she’s a nocturnal monster. Glenn nodded. She’d been hiding her face to avoid the light. “And you are?”

“Now you’re asking my na—oh, forget it. I can’t have you thinking I’m a thief. I’ll just tell you.” The bat girl flashed an evil-looking grin.

She had a mole by her mouth, which drew attention to her sharp fangs. They looked like they could easily pierce the skin of any living being, and they clearly weren’t made for chewing food.

Glenn suddenly realized who he was talking to. This girl must be

“I am Plum. Plum Murdrac. I’m sure you’ve heard of me. I’m the daughter of the vampire family living at the hotel.”

Murdrac.

The vampire family.

Here was one of the reclusive vampires at the center of the issue Glenn had been tasked with fixing, right in town.

“Nice to meet you, young man. You seem nice.” The bat girl grinned again, showing off her fangs, and held her wing out toward Glenn.

Case 02: An Impulsive Vampire

“**W**ow, new items!” Plum Murdrac said.

Glenn had decided to take her into Memé’s shop for the time being. Apparently, she’d been staring at the “closed” sign not only because she was peeved to learn that she’d wasted time coming all this way, but also because a man she didn’t recognize was putting the sign up.

“This is everything you’d expect from a totes trendy accessory shop in Lindworm!”

She had a sharp eye and an abrasive tone. Her vocabulary was a bit strange, but other than that, she was exactly what you’d expect a vampire from such a noble lineage to be.

“And where does the patrol team get off nabbing people off the street?” Plum demanded.

“S-Sioux is sorry. But you *did* look suspicious.”

“You shouldn’t judge a book by its cover. I can’t handle the sunlight. A girl’s gotta protect herself. You gotta be sharper than that, ya know?”

Sioux shrank under the truth of those words. The vampires, with their bat-like characteristics, probably kept to the dim graveyard city for a reason. Plum had a dark complexion to begin with, but she also looked tanned, even though her big, hooded overcoat covered every inch of her skin. If this was what happened even with measures to protect herself, Glenn couldn’t imagine what sustained exposure to direct sunlight might do to her.

Now inside, she’d removed her coat and was excitedly looking at all the jewelry on sale. He could see her claws and webbed wings, and her bat-like ears stood up on her head.

“Hmm? What are you lookin’ at?”

“Ah, oh... Sorry. I’ve never seen a vampire before.”

“Even if I’m your first, it’s still rude to stare.”

Glenn bowed his head in apology.

“Brother is a doctor!” Sioux said, pulling herself together.

“Yes. Right. I am Glenn Litbeit, monster doctor. It’s nice to meet you.”

“Hmmm... A doctor, huh?”

She looked at him in a way that wasn’t entirely indifferent, but still fairly cold. Maybe it had something to do with the authority vampires held over other species...though other species in Lindworm possessing longevity or authority, like the capricious dragon, Skadi, the big-hearted giant, Dione, or the lustful plantation owner, Aluloona, weren’t condescending at all.

“Where is Memé?” Plum asked.

“Memé...is resting right now. She was sleep-deprived from overwork,” Glenn answered vaguely. He couldn’t bring himself to tell her that Memé was sleep-deprived because of *her*.

“Seriously? Is she okay? Oh, so that’s why a doctor’s here.”

“That’s right.”

“Hmm. Then I’ll just look around myself.” It wasn’t exactly conceit, but Plum did seem to be in her own little world.

She neatly folded her wings. Bat wings were actually five fingers that had evolved into longer digits with webbing between them, and Plum’s wings looked to be the same. She picked up various items of jewelry between the claws at the ends of her fingers, carefully inspecting and commenting on all of them. Apparently, she had very specific fashion preferences.

Under her overcoat, she wore all-black clothing—a thin dress that showed off the curves of her body, the likes of which you didn’t normally see in Lindworm. It was covered in sequins and sparkly jewelry. She was also wearing a lot of accessories with pointy tips, shaped like claws and fangs.

Glenn stared.

“Are you a friend of Memé’s?” Sioux asked.

Plum didn’t look particularly put off by this question. “Not a... friend,” she said, rubbing the side of her face with one claw. Glenn

wondered if she was feeling embarrassed.

The polish on her claws was fluorescent. He thought it looked familiar, but he couldn't recall seeing a lot of nail polish in Lindworm, either.

"This shop is new, right? I heard that my mentor collaborated on some pieces, so I came to check them out. But since I have a tough time walking around during the day, and since my folks are so strict, it's hard to get here," Plum explained.

She spoke about Memé like they knew each other. And who was this mentor she'd mentioned?

"Memé, please wait!" Sapphee's voice came from the back.
"Memé, you need to sleep longer!"

"I-I'm okay. I slept some... Is there a customer here?"

Memé appeared, apparently woken by Glenn and the others' voices. She looked a little better. The Barometz sleep-inducing medication really was strong. Even though Memé had only slept for a little while, it had been deep and restful sleep.

"Oh! There you are, Memé-chi."

"M-Memé-chi?!"

"I read about this place in the paper. Congrats on the store. I've been wanting to talk to you, but you're always in the back or busy working." Plum looked cool as ever, but her tone was softer with Memé.

"Eeeee!" Memé, on the other hand, was clearly flustered, her giant eye roving about the room.

"These new pieces are amazing. Did you make them? Didn't you, like, just open?"

"I-I just had some extra materials..."

"That's nuts, this stuff is gorgeous!"

The two girls couldn't have been less alike. All Glenn knew was that it seemed like Plum respected Memé. She was smiling, her fangs peeking past her lips. Meanwhile, Memé was stammering, not sure exactly how to respond to what might be a potentially regular customer.

But Glenn was already thinking about something else. He decided to be blunt, and also to offer Memé a lifeline, taking some of the pressure off her.

“Plum, can I speak to you for a minute?”

“Huh? What about?”

“Are you injured, by any chance?”

“Ah!” Plum’s eyes opened wide in surprise. “How’d you know? I totally thought I was hiding it.”

“The way you open and close your wings seemed a bit stiff, so I thought, maybe...if you’d like, I can examine them.”

“Wow, Doctor.” Plum lifted both hands.

Her webbed wings spread wide. It almost looked like she was holding out a coat. Her wings were quite large, their span probably about the same as Illy’s.

“Umm...”

Plum spread her wings even wider, making it easier to see.

The webbing stretched from under her armpit to the spaces between her claws. They’d been folded against her side, and probably only stretched to their full width when she was flying. He realized it must be hard for her to wear clothing with sleeves. Indeed, Plum was currently wearing a sleeveless dress that boldly bared her shoulders.

Glenn tried pulling gently on the webbing under her arm. It stretched in an interesting way, incredibly elastic.

“A-aggh! Th-that tickles!”

“I’m sorry. Please try to hold still.”

“Uggh...” Plum lifted her arm again, looking unhappy.

Glenn pulled the webbed wings open.

“Mmmm, ooh.”

“I see...it’s right here.”

“Hmm?”

Under Plum’s armpit, her webbing had torn in a few places.



“Ergh. I can’t believe you noticed that. I was hiding it ’cause it’s gross.”

“Did it get caught on something?”

“Yeah...on my jewelry.”

Glenn understood. The webbing had to be lightweight to allow for flight, which also meant it was fragile. “That looks painful.”

“It doesn’t really hurt, but I can’t fly with torn wings. And also, doesn’t it look gross?! It’s the woorst!”

Plum was clearly very conscious of her appearance. Arahnia, Glenn’s fiancée, was the same way. He thought back to how she’d used makeup to hide her illness.

“Hey, Doc, can you fix this up?”

“Your torn wings will heal naturally. You need to rest and avoid flying for a while.”

“Whaaa? Seriously? I don’t have to do anything?”

“They’re made to tear easily. They’re also made to heal easily.”

“Wow, cool! So I can just leave them be, then? Sweet.”

“But...” Glenn looked at her with a stern face. “If they tore because of your accessories, then you need to take those accessories off. In fact, you should avoid wearing pointy things.”

“Whaaa...? No way,” Plum protested.

Glenn ignored her. “If you wear the same jewelry, your webbing will tear again. I thought you said the tears were gross?”

“Wahhh... Seriously...?”

Glenn never compromised when it came to the health of his patients. Besides, *all* the accessories Plum wore were pointy. He guessed that she must like that style, but it wasn’t worth damaging her wings.

“Fine. Guess I’ll just buy some new, non-pointy ones. Got anything good, Memé?”

“Hunh.” Memé, who’d spaced out during the aggressive encounter, suddenly came to. “Uh, uhhh... Something that won’t damage your wings... Maybe a rounded end, like this...? Or something leather, like this...?”

“Ohhh, that’s it. Perfect.”

“O-oh, and I can also round the tips of the jewelry you’re currently wearing...”

“Seriously? That’s amazing. Yeah, do that, please.”

After putting in a number of specific orders, Plum paid Memé, tipping generously. Money was no object for the Murdracs.

“Well, all I can say now is that you two need to take care of yourselves. Especially you, Memé. Make sure you get some sleep,” Glenn said.

“I-I know,” Memé said, tears in her eye as she took Plum’s money.

“It’s okay,” Sapphee said. “I left an air freshener with Barometz essence in your room. It’s not as strong as the eyedrops, but it should help you sleep soundly.”

Sapphee had really been putting her pharmacist skills to work when no one was looking. Glenn continued to be impressed by her brilliance.

Since the stranger in the overcoat wasn’t really a stranger anymore, Memé’s anxiety shouldn’t bother her any more. Hopefully, she’d be able to sleep soundly tonight.

“Oh, hey, Memé-chi. I want to look at that thing, too.”

“Wh-what thing?”

“Didn’t you and my mentor collaborate on some stuff?”

“Mentor...”

“Yeah, that’s right,” Plum said casually. “My mentor, Arahnia. You know her, right?”

“Huh?!”

Sapphee gasped and Glenn’s eyes grew round. He remembered where he’d seen that fluorescent polish before.

On Arahnia.

“Who?”

Several days later, Arahnia stopped by the clinic on her break—apparently just popping in between jobs. Glenn used the opportunity to ask if she knew Plum Murdrac.

Arahnia's response was clipped. "The Murdracs are that vampire family, right?"

"So, you do know her?"

"The arachne were one of the tribes the vampires assisted in uniting."

Evidently, the Murdracs's reach extended across a variety of species.

Arachnes had relatively weak digestive organs for their size. Half of their bodies were made for generating and excreting webbing. They craved sustenance to generate that thread, but due to their delicate digestive systems, they couldn't eat large amounts of meat. Indeed, Glenn had heard that their main source of sustenance had once been the bodily fluids of animals.

"Was it because arachne—sucking the fluids from their prey—were a lot like vampires?" he asked.

"I don't know. I mean, it's easy to get plenty of food without going to the trouble of hunting animals, nowadays. The point is, I've never met Lord Murdrac's daughter."

"But Plum clearly called you her mentor, Arahnia."

"I don't have any apprentices. The only designer at Loose Silk Sewing in this town is me, and my hands are full looking after the seamstresses."

Glenn tilted his head. It *was* hard to imagine Arahnia as a mentor. She was good at caring for people, but mentorship was a different kettle of fish. He didn't see her as the type to willingly teach others her trade.

"Maybe she read about you in the town newspaper?" Sapphee said as she brought in a tray laden with cups. She handed Glenn one and poured black tea into it from the kettle she held with her tail.

"Arahnia, you made something at Memé's shop, right?"

"Oh, yeah, I did. I designed some accessories, and Memé made them. I can't do any of that metal-welding stuff."

"I'm sure she saw that in the town paper." Sapphee said. "Even if

she didn't, Arahnia's clothing designs have a big following."

"Heh. You flatter me."

Glenn took Sapphee's word for it. He didn't have any particular preferences when it came to clothing, and Arahnia's designs were mainly for women. There wasn't much opportunity for him to personally evaluate her work, though the fact that she had passionate fans spoke to its quality.

"So, she's just a fan who calls me 'mentor,' even though we've never met?"

"Perhaps..."

"Well, that's fine with me. Who cares? If she's coming into town, then we'll meet sooner or later. It'll be great." Arahnia chuckled. Even if she didn't need an apprentice, she apparently enjoyed having fans.

"You seem really busy, too, Miss Arahnia..."

"Hey now! We're engaged. No need to call me 'miss' anymore."

"I-It's just a habit..."

"Yeah?" Arahnia sipped her tea, seemingly unbothered. "Umm, what I'm working on now is all gear for working the fields. It's peak season for those. Then there're the designs for the harvest festival itself. Oh, and the additional accessories for Memé. And, umm..." She used her multiple arms to count off all of her tasks.

"Th-that's more than I was expecting."

Aluloona Plantation had several busy seasons each year, but autumn was by far the busiest. Every year, Aluloona hired temporary farmhands, and naturally, needed to order appropriate work clothing for all of them. Loose Silk Sewing was tasked with coming up with the necessary designs to fit the various species involved.

And this year, there was also the harvest festival to consider.

They still hadn't got Lord Murdrac's permission, but the preparations had already begun. The plan was for attendees to dress up as the dead and undead, which meant the task of making costumes, too, had fallen to Loose Silk Sewing.

"You're busy...but it's fun, right?"

"Fun?" Arahnia thought for a moment and smiled. "Doc, an artist needs fuel to keep them going. Of course, there are some things I can't

do with my own hands, but I wanna do as much as I can.”

“Do you mean that?”

“Aren’t you the same, Doc?”

This question made Glenn think.

“I love what I do. But I’d prefer it if no one needed to come to the clinic. Not that that would ever happen.”

“You truly are a good person, Doc. No wonder I’m marrying you! I just fell in love all over again.” Arahnia covered her mouth with her hand, but it wasn’t enough to mask the cackle that erupted from her.

It sounded like a sarcastic laugh, but Glenn knew better. These exaggerated and dramatic gestures were the only way that Arahnia could express her true feelings.

“Thank you very much. I’m really glad we’re engaged, too.”

“Oh?! Heh, heh! Ahem...” Arahnia choked at this unexpected comeback. After over a year of knowing her, Glenn had learned that it was best to be straightforward about his feelings.

“Would you stop all that lovey-dovey talk in front of me?” Sapphee glared at them as she peeled the hard-boiled egg she’d brought for lunch.

“Ahh, are you jealous? Don’t you worry. This mistress doesn’t plan on taking your spot there, Sapphee.”

“I know, but it’s irritating to watch you show off how much you trust each other.”

“I’m the only one you have no verbal filter with, huh?” Arahnia looked like she was thoroughly enjoying herself.

Glenn was officially engaged to both of them, but Arahnia chose to call herself a mistress. He wasn’t sure if she was doing that for Sapphee’s sake, or because Arahnia herself liked to maintain that distance. Maybe it was both.

That was probably why she got along with Sapphee so well.

“Ahem... Well, setting that aside, how was Memé’s shop?”

“It’s doing well. Memé was a little...anxious...”

“That can’t be helped. Once I finish up my work, I’ll go take a look.”

Busy as she was, she'd taken the time to come see Glenn. Glenn hoped some good would come of her apparent friendship with Memé.

"Whaddya say, Doc? It's the perfect opportunity to buy something for me."

"Y-you mean jewelry?"

"I'd be happy with anything from you, Doc," she said, giving him a sidelong glance.

Neither Sapphee nor Tisalia would have said something so forthright to Glenn. This type of pressure was new to him. However, he was a little afraid of the daggers shooting out of Sapphee's eyes.

"You didn't buy anything for me, did you, Doctor?"

"B-but you were buying your own..."

"Hmph."

Glenn wasn't sure what to do about Sapphee's sulking. Maybe he was failing his duties as a soon-to-be husband.

"Oh dear, maybe I said something I shouldn't have. We can't be fighting."

"And whose fault do you think that is?!"

"Okay, Doc, how about you buy something for each of us?"

Arahnia moved her face closer to his. Glenn recoiled at these words. He wondered if Arahnia had figured out the real reason why he'd visited Memé's shop.

"Oh, um..." Glenn tried to warn her silently, but—

"What is it?"

"Arahnia...do you already know?" he hissed under his breath.

"You'll have to try harder if you wanna surprise me." Arahnia cackled. Going forward, Glenn would just have to assume she could read his every thought. "I was trying to trick you into telling me."

"Ergh..."

"I can't wait to get mine."

"Just what are you two talking about over there in secret?!" Sapphee snatched the cup from Glenn's hand with her tail. She apparently wanted to wash it, but it was rather a violent way to let him know that.

“Okay, okay. Sapphee, no need to lose your cool. I was just saying I can’t wait until the harvest festival.”

“Do you have to be that close together for that?”

“What’s wrong with that? We’re engaged, after all.”

“Ergh...” Sapphee was running out of excuses for her jealousy.

Although she’d agreed to the plural marriage, Sapphee was the jealous type, and it seemed she was having trouble reconciling her conflicting feelings. Maybe she was even more emotional about it because she and Arahnia were so close.

“Sapphee, let’s go to the harvest festival together once it starts. I want to check it out.”

Such an invitation from Glenn was rare. Sapphee looked at him, surprised. “I want to...but what are you going to do about getting Lord Murdrac’s permission?”

“Oh, yeah. That’s right.” Glenn sighed. He hadn’t made any progress on that front at all, aside from meeting Plum Murdrac. “I should have talked to Plum about it, but I was preoccupied with her condition.”

“You’re always a doctor, wherever you go.” It was Sapphee’s turn to sigh, exasperation in her voice. They’d have to ask Plum for an introduction next time.

“Do you need me to swoop in and come to your rescue? That girl’s a big fan of mine, right?”

“Even if Plum introduces us to Lord Murdrac, I can’t think of a good way to convince him.”

“Oh, dear. In that case, there won’t be any harvest festival at all! Or a harvest festival date with Sapphee, for that matter.”

“Er... I-I’ll figure something out,” Glenn said, without the faintest clue as to what that something might be. For now, he’d try to meet with Plum and ask her what the Murdracs thought about the festival. He wondered if he might run into her at Memé’s shop again? He was also still concerned about her wings.

“I’m looking forward to our date, Doctor,” Sapphee said with the biggest grin on her face.

Was she trying to pressure him? Or was she just genuinely

excited? Either way, Glenn couldn't resist Sapphee's smile.

Despite his lack of confidence, all he could do was nod.

The nights were growing longer, and Glenn was getting some (uncharacteristically) sound sleep. He was always so busy that he rarely slept deeply, but this particular night was quiet. Maybe a little *too* quiet, which was exactly why he was sleeping so well.

"Mmmm..."

His slumber was interrupted by the sensation that someone had entered his room.

"Er... Sapphee?" he gulped.

Sometimes, in the winter, Sapphee would sneak into Glenn's bedroom. Lamia were cold-blooded animals. She'd snuggle with Glenn to keep warm, as if he were her own personal space heater.

But Sapphee would already have wrapped herself around him. Glenn opened his eyes. He could see something shining in the dark room. Was it a lantern? The moonlight?

No.

A pair of eyes.

"Keee..."

A high-pitched sound almost beyond the range of his hearing filled the room. Before Glenn even had time to wonder what it was, the shining eyes made a rush for his neck.

"Argh?!" he cried out without thinking as he felt two sharp fangs pierce his skin.

Slurp... Smack...

His attacker was now licking the blood gushing from where he'd been bitten. It was too dark for him to see the culprit, but he had a pretty good guess.

"Er... Argh!"

It felt like a rough tongue was being thrust into his wound. He

wanted to push whoever it was away, but his strength was no match for the attacker. Both his arms were pinned to the bed.

Slurp...

“Mmm!”

Slurp...

The sound of Glenn’s blood being lapped up echoed out into the night.

Then...

“Doctor?! I heard screaming. What happened?!”

The room was suddenly flooded with light.

“Keee!” The attacker let out a frightened cry and backed away from Glenn.

Sapphee rushed into the room, holding a lantern in her tail. Several fairies followed her with their own fairy-sized lanterns. Glenn slapped a hand to the bite on his neck.

There’s not that much blood... It was just a puncture wound, and there was no internal damage. He tore off a strip of his bedsheet and held it to his neck to staunch the blood.

“Doctor, are you all right?”

“Yes, I’m only bleeding...a little.”

“Your neck... Doctor, this...!” Sapphee looked at the attacker in the corner of the room. “Oh...uh...”

The intruder was covering her face with both winged arms. She’d said she didn’t do well in sunlight, but her stance made it look like she feared all light.

“Is that...?”

“Yeah.”

Although she was hiding her face, the combination of blonde hair, tan skin, and bat wings was a dead giveaway.

Glenn moved toward her, still holding his neck.

“It’s okay. I’m fine. You don’t need to cry.”

“I-I’m sorry! I...I did something horrible to you, Doctor!” she blubbered. Plum folded her wings and looked fearfully toward him,

tears streaming down her face.

“What should we do, Doctor?”

Tend to his wound, for starters. Luckily, it wasn't deep, and the ointment Sapphee kept on hand was highly effective. He wrapped it up and turned back to the problem at hand.

“Have you calmed down, Plum?”

She was staring at the ground, a pained look on her face. Sapphee had served her an herbal tea with sedative effects, and Plum Murdrac sipped it, but remained silent. Her face was stained with tears, and there was still a bit of blood on the corner of her mouth.

“Why would you do something like that?”

She'd snuck into Glenn's room without a sound, then committed an act that made her worthy of the old vampire nickname of bloodsucker. The girl they'd seen during the day had been aloof, self-confident... It was hard to believe she could so suddenly go from that to attacking someone.

“Honestly...lately, my impulse to drink blood has gotten stronger.”

“Impulse?”

“Sometimes I just get this *craving* for blood. It's not so bad. Normally I keep it at bay by drinking tea or something. But these days, I just can't help myself...”

Glenn sensed she was going to start crying again, so he tried to calm her down. “So you don't normally drink blood?”

“Mmm... Well, Dad, Mom, and I don't really... I mean, we usually eat fruit. We don't *need* blood to live. We're called bloodsuckers, sure, but I've never really done any of that before...”

“I see. Incidentally, what fruit do you like to eat the most?”

“Plums...” Plum said bashfully.

Maybe she was embarrassed about loving the very food she was named after. Glenn thought for a moment. Plums didn't taste anything like blood. But then, vampires didn't eat fruit *in lieu* of sucking blood. Fruit was their main source of nutrition.

“Wouldn't animal blood work?”

“Yeah...I’ve tried animals before. Their blood makes me gag. Dad says that vampires all prefer different things. I...I probably only like blood from people my age...”

Preference, huh? Legend had it that vampires preferred to attack virgin women. Was that not a species-wide preference thing, but merely the preference of certain individual vampires?

“I have some relatives who drink animal blood...but I can’t even stand the smell.”

“Did you talk to your parents about this?”

“Mom and Dad said if I want to drink blood, I should find somebody I like. They said I’m a Murdrac, so I won’t get in trouble.”

Glenn held his head in his hands. Evidently, Lord Murdrac cared more about his own rules than the city ordinances...although he’d never heard of people being attacked by vampires in Lindworm before.

“Well, we can’t overlook intentional harm inflicted on the people of this city,” Sapphee said. The incident in which her own family had poisoned the Waterways was all too fresh in her mind. She was sensitive to this sort of issue.

“Nah, I don’t think they were serious,” Plum waved her wing in dismissal. “Mom and Dad are old-fashioned. They’ve always been super concerned with their image as vampires. So, sometimes they tell me things like how I’m different from other species, and better than them, and all... But they’re afraid of the Draconess, and I’m pretty sure we would lose if things really came to blows.”

Glenn wondered about that. She’d been impossibly strong when she attacked him, and her fangs were sharp. But that was all. Compared to monsters born for battle, like ogres and centaurs, vampire strength might not be all that impressive.

Humans really were far too weak.

“That’s why I originally just planned to ask you for help, Doctor.”

“Help?”

“I thought, you know...you could do something for me.”

“Is that why you came at night?” Glenn asked gently, aware that she might start crying again at any moment. Plum had come from the graveyard city to the clinic during her normal waking hours.

“But when I saw you, I...”

“You what?”

“The impulse... I couldn’t control it...”

There was that impulse again.

“The smell of your blood, Doctor... It’s my favorite...”

“I see.”

She’d been unable to control the urge bubbling up inside of her, and ended up biting Glenn.

“I understand the situation now. It’s a very sensitive subject, and we need to make sure it doesn’t leave this clinic. Don’t you agree, Doctor?” Sapphee stroked Plum’s back, clearly implying Glenn shouldn’t alert the patrol team. Though her jealousy was sometimes frightening, Sapphee was a genuinely sweet person.

“I agree.”

“Good. I hope you’re grateful to the Doctor, Plum.”

Plum nodded, her eyes still brimming with tears.

“Now then, what shall we do? Would it be better if I escorted her back to the graveyard city?”

“No, please wait.”

The most important issue hadn’t been resolved yet.

It was the reason *behind* Plum’s impulse. According to her, like bats, vampires weren’t active bloodsuckers. So, why had Plum’s urges suddenly increased?

“We need to do something about this impulse to suck blood, or the same thing might happen again. I want to take measures to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

“Measures? Is there something you can do, Doctor?”

“I don’t know a lot about vampires, but...”

Glenn thought for a moment.

A lot of what he’d studied about vampires at the academy had been intermingled with legend and superstition. For example, they were susceptible to sunlight. They were susceptible to crosses. They were susceptible to running water. If you drove a stake through their heart...

Actually, the chest was a weak point for most living beings.

They were also supposed to be immortal. No creatures were truly immortal, so that probably referred to the fact that they lived long lives, like dragons and scyllas.

Plum was susceptible to sunlight, but that was because she was a nocturnal monster. Glenn hadn't seen any sign of her being susceptible to crosses, especially given the nature of some of the jewelry at Memé's shop. She seemed okay with running water, too.

But there was something he'd learned from examining her.

"I have an idea. I believe vampires are monsters with strong bat-like characteristics."

"It seems that way, but how does that help?"

"I believe this impulse to suck blood is similar to impulses in bats and other animals."

Sapphee looked at Glenn quizzically.

"There are bats that drink blood regularly. But vampires don't. Certain conditions make vampires feel a stronger urge to drink blood... just like mosquitos."

Sapphee's face lit up as she understood.

Mosquitos normally sustained themselves on the nectar of plants and fruit juices. It was only the females that bit animals, humans, and monsters...specifically when they needed nutrients for reproduction. Cthulhy was actually conducting research on mosquitos and their ability to be a vector for disease.

"But that... Does that mean Plum is getting ready to reproduce?"

"Oh, no, no! I don't know about that! Don't tell me I'm a mosquito!" Plum was crying again.

Glenn shook his head calmly. "No. If that were the case, vampire men would never feel compelled to drink blood. You crave superfoods when you need a large amount of nutrients in a short amount of time. And there are other reasons for this besides procreation. For example, injury or illness."

"Oh..." Plum finally understood, too. She spread her wings. The holes she'd shown Glenn had shrunk a bit, but they were still there.

"Your webbing is injured. You naturally crave blood because your

body wants to repair your wings.”

“Oh...” Plum seemed to accept this. “Dad said that vampires drink blood so they can live longer. Is that why? We get nutrients from blood?”

“It does seem like the blood of other species rapidly increases your ability to recover from illness and injury. It probably contributes to your longevity as a species.”

“I didn’t know...”

Glenn thought some more. If the injury to her wings was giving her the urge to drink blood, then those urges would last until she was healed. And she’d heal faster if she actually consumed blood, but she said she couldn’t drink animal blood. Forcing her to try would just make her vomit, which would be pointless.

The only blood she could drink...was Glenn’s.

“I don’t think there’s any other way.”

“Doctor?”

“Plum, I give you permission to drink my blood as part of your treatment.”

“What?!” Sapphee thumped her tail in warning after hearing Glenn’s decision. “Just a minute—that’s dangerous! Dr. Glenn, she just bit you, and now you’re going to give her your blood? You don’t even know how important blood is to her recovery!”

“It shouldn’t take much just to keep her craving at bay.”

“You don’t know that! I will *not* allow you to put yourself in danger, Dr. Glenn!” Sapphee’s expression was earnest. “If you must, we could extract a safe amount of blood and let Plum drink that...”

“That might come with the risk of spreading infection. I believe vampires evolved their fangs precisely to remove the risks of drinking blood that wasn’t fresh, or might have been contaminated.”

“B-but there’s no reason you need to sacrifice your *own* blood...”

“Voluntarily offering her my blood is within the scope of treating her as her doctor. I cannot ask another person to give up their blood. This is the most appropriate solution.”

“Er...”

At the academy, they were doing research on blood transfusions, which meant extracting blood from one person and giving it to another for treatment. If that research had progressed further, then Plum would have nothing to worry about. As it was, though, they had yet to find a secure, stable way to store or transfer extracted blood, or reliably avoid contamination.

“But...but...”

“Ummm...Sapphee?” Plum cut in. “I-It’s my fault. I shouldn’t have left the graveyard city. So, I’ll get out of your hair now. I don’t want to attack anyone. Dad might pitch a fit, but if I tie myself up in my room while I heal, then I won’t hurt anyone else.”

“Plum...”

That was unreasonable. Glenn knew Sapphee wasn’t okay with it, but he couldn’t think of any way to solve this besides Plum drinking his blood.

Sapphee swished her tail back and forth, frowning. “Fine. But if I determine that Dr. Glenn’s life is in danger, I’ll put a stop to it immediately!”

“Of course. I don’t want to die.” Glenn smiled at Plum. “We’ll make sure to take every safety measure possible.”

From there, they moved into the treatment room.

Sapphee directed the fairies to prepare the room for the procedure. First, they brought out a large volume of fluids for him to drink. Next, Sapphee wrapped her tail around Glenn’s left arm. There was a pulse rate meter in the clinic, but it wasn’t terribly accurate. Sapphee was much more precise at reading it with her tail. She tightened her grip.

“Hey, Plum,” Glenn called to her as they waited for all the preparations to be finished. “You seem different from when we met you in town.”

“Er...” Plum looked like she was about to break down again.

When they’d first spoken that night, she seemed genuinely apologetic for attacking Glenn. However, something gave him the feeling that it wasn’t just guilt...but that she actually had a timid personality.

“Because...” Plum muttered, trailing off.

“Hmm?”

“I was wearing makeup... It was my first time showing myself in Lindworm, so I put on extra makeup, trying to make myself look like a classy vampire for my big debut. What a waste.”

She was sulking, or maybe just being self-deprecating.

“I never should have left the graveyard district,” she went on. “Dad was right. My dignity would’ve stayed intact if I’d never showed myself to anyone.”

“For what it’s worth, I don’t think most of the powerful people in Lindworm have any dignity...” Glenn chuckled, thinking specifically of the city council. “Also, what about the people you met when you came here?”

“People I met...”

She’d been able to chat with Memé confidently enough, even if she’d just been putting on a show of bravado. If Plum was actually an introvert, or had trouble talking to new people, then she and Memé would get along well.

“N-nah...” Plum turned her head away. “It’s not like I’m excited I met you...Doctor.”

“Does that mean—Ow!” Glenn cried out in pain as Sapphee squeezed him, hard.

“Excuse me. I didn’t mean to coil that tight. We’re almost ready to begin.”

“Was that really an accident?”

“Of course it was! It’s not like I think you’re ogling a young girl or anything, Doctor,” Sapphee said nonchalantly. Ever since they’d gotten engaged, she’d been even stricter about Glenn so much as looking at other women. Not that he had any intention of cheating.

“Wh-what should I do?” Plum asked apprehensively.

“All you need to do is suck his blood. I’m worried about blood loss from his neck, so do it here, please.”

Glenn held the fingers of his right hand out for Plum. Since his heartrate had to be monitored the entire time, he couldn’t leave his perch on the chair. That meant Plum had to kneel to access his fingers.

“If you suck the blood from my fingers, the flow won’t be too

strong. It might not even be enough to satisfy you. But if you can lick a little at a time, I think it will help curb your craving.”

“O-okay...” Plum said, taking Glenn’s hand. She was hesitant, but her eyes gleamed like those of a carnivore eyeing its prey. “O-okay... here I go.”

Plum opened her mouth and gently bit Glenn’s finger.

He saw her fangs peek out from her lips and felt the bite on his neck ache in sympathy.

Sl-slurp...

Her fangs scraped over Glenn’s skin. She was looking for the optimal place to bite. Then he felt a sharp pain, like the prick of a needle, shoot up his arm.

“Nngh...” Glenn stifled a noise. If he appeared to be in too much agony, Sapphee would put a stop to it.

Sl-slurp...

Smack...

Plum started licking the pierced middle finger with her rough tongue.

“Ahhm... Mmm, hmmm... Mmm...”

“Ow.”

Plum put both his middle finger and ring finger into her mouth. They were so deep he could feel the mucous membrane at the back of her throat. He could feel the temperature of the inside of her body. As she moved Glenn’s fingers around in her mouth, Plum’s expression was that of someone inebriated.

Actually, she probably *was* inebriated, in a way. The instinct to drink blood was self-preservation—a way to recover from injury or illness. It wasn’t her fault that she couldn’t control her impulses.

“Doctor, are you all right?”

“Y-yeah, I’m fine.”

No matter how much Plum succumbed to her craving, he was only losing a miniscule amount of blood this way. Glenn wasn’t in any real danger.

“Mmm! Hmm...”

Slurp...

Slurrrp...

Plum moved her head up and down, sucking violently, trying to get even a little bit more. Glenn's fingers were covered in her saliva. In fact, his whole fist was wet. Plum was bent forward, her hands on the floor to hold herself up. Her head was moving so violently that it caused her well-endowed chest to swing back and forth as well. If she hadn't been sucking his blood at that moment, Glenn surely would have enjoyed the sight.

"Hm! Mmmm, hmm... Oooh... Ahhmmm..."

Plum couldn't stop. She had a wild look in her eyes. The way she was completely engrossed in sucking his blood reminded Glenn of a beast acting on instinct.

"Mmm... Mmm, ohhh..."

He was starting to worry that his nails might scratch the back of her throat when something made him stop short.

He tilted his head to one side.

The temperature of his hand was gradually dropping. He could see blood mixed with the saliva dripping from Plum's mouth as she continued to suck violently. It was...a lot of blood.

Glenn was confused. He felt...cool. He couldn't tell if it was chills or the sensation of his blood leaving his body.

"Mmm...mmph... Mmm..."

Slurp...

Smack...

Plum looked like she was enjoying the taste of his blood. From time to time, she'd pull her mouth away from his hand and swallow the blood that had accumulated in her mouth. She was so preoccupied with sucking that she kept forgetting to breathe. Then she'd suddenly remember and draw in a loud breath.

"Ahhh...mmm! Mmmph, mmm..."

"Er!"

Glenn had remembered something.

Mosquito saliva prevented blood from coagulating. It would make

perfect sense if vampire saliva had the same effect. Damn. Even two minor pricks on his finger was enough to keep him bleeding steadily. At this rate, Plum, who now had a bloodthirsty look in her eyes, would keep going until she was satisfied...and he was drained.

“Doctor, your pulse is quickening.”

“I-I’m okay...”

There was still time. Despite her loud sounds and exaggerated movements, Plum had still only drawn a small amount of his blood. As long as he stayed aware of any changes in his body, it would be fine.

Glenn took a drink, in part to calm himself down. The cold water cleared his head.

“Mmm... Agh...”

“P-Plum...slow it down a bit...”

“Mmmph, mmph... Mmm!”

He could *feel* his blood being sucked. As his fingertips grew cold, he also felt a faint sensation, like an electric current.

“Mmm!”

Slurp! Slurrrp! Smaaack!

“Ergh...”

Plum pulled Glenn’s fingers even farther back into her throat. With each instance of suction, as his bodily fluids flowed out, a sense of comfort flowed in. Even though his blood was being sucked, he felt no pain...instead, a current of pleasure ran through him.

Maybe this was a mistake...

It was said that vampires charmed the women they preyed on in order to suck their blood. What if their saliva contained not just anticoagulants, but also a component that melted inhibitions, like a drug? The more human blood Plum sucked, the more vampire saliva entered Glenn’s veins. But by the time he realized the danger, it was already too late.

“Mmm... Ahmm... Mmm... Ahhm, mmmph...!”

The exchange also seemed to be affecting Plum. The shine in her eyes was completely different. Glenn wondered how he looked through her intoxicated pupils.

Plum pulled back, her tongue lapping the tips of Glenn's fingers as if her life depended on it.

Her fangs traced the sensitive prick on his finger, then her rough tongue again. Her saliva flowed freely. Glenn did everything he could to resist the urge to arch his back.

"Mmmph! Ahhmm...Mmm...!"

"Er...argh."

His blood wouldn't coagulate. This pleasure was clouding his brain. He tried to resist, but the sucking sensation robbed him of his free will. He wondered if Plum knew...but she would surely have said something if she did. At this point, she seemed to have completely lost control and was operating solely on instinct.

"Doctor, it's starting to get dangerous... Doctor?"

"Ergh!"

His fingers twitched. As Plum continued to violently suck his blood, Sapphee noticed that Glenn was acting strange.

"Plum, it's time to finish. Can you hear me?!"

"Mmm...!"

Plum didn't stop sucking.

Glenn could feel his body temperature dropping. He desperately tried to regain his bearings. He'd lost too much blood.

Even after being told by Sapphee to stop, Plum wasn't giving up Glenn's fingers. She'd pulled them back into her mouth. Her excited breath tickled Glenn's skin, which only added to the stimulation he felt from the bloodsucking.

I didn't think it would go this far... He hadn't taken the danger seriously enough. He hadn't even considered the special bodily traits vampires might possess, like saliva to make the blood flow and intoxicate their prey. His decision to offer his own blood, even to prevent anyone else from getting hurt, had been a big mistake.

"Mmmm, mmmph! Ahhhh, oh, er, ohhh...!"

Glenn's hand was dripping with blood and saliva, which slid down Plum's neck, wetting her voluptuous breasts. Completely oblivious to this, she continued vigorously moving her head back and forth. She and Glenn were covered in each other's fluids.

“Mmmph, ahh, mmmhhmm! Mmmph! Mmph!”

Plum was calling out like a beast, but Glenn couldn’t resist. The strength had been drained from him.

“Mmmphhh! Ooooh!” *Slurp!*

I guess I still have a lot to learn...

Glenn felt himself going went limp. He was having trouble focusing his eyes. For some reason, all he could think about was Sapphee, Tisalia and Arahnia, his fiancées. He could no longer see anything in front of him. Everything was hazy.

I’m sorry... I’ll try harder!

Delicious, delicious, delicious, so goooood!

Plum was completely oblivious to the rest of the world.

I never knew blood was this delicious!

Plum lived in the Deadlich Hotel, where her parents had brought her several years prior. All vampires were nocturnal and avoided excessive contact with other species, but the Murdracs were especially conservative. They honored tradition to protect their noble bloodline.

As a result, Plum’s lifestyle was rather...restricted. Unnecessary outings weren’t allowed. Modern clothing wasn’t allowed. Unnecessary fraternizing with other species wasn’t allowed.

Her father believed this was the way vampires ought to be. Her mother adored everything about her father.

But Plum...

Ever since coming to Deadlich Hotel, she’d heard a lot about Lindworm. In Lindworm, many different species all lived together. Everything about the town sounded fun and exciting. For example, the famous designer who made clothes for any monster. She’d also heard a rumor about a craftswoman who, although an extreme introvert, made jewelry on her own. On top of that, there was the town doctor who would treat anyone, whatever their species.

Plum was starved for stimulation. She wanted to be entertained.

She'd lived such a sheltered life. As a lady of the Murdrac family, she'd been raised with great care, but the only world she knew was the world of night, where vampires ruled. Even after hearing about how advanced Lindworm was, she couldn't muster up the courage to venture out into that world.

That's why she'd dressed up in fashionable clothing. She was sure that by doing so, she would live up to the expectations everyone had of the Murdrac family. They would see her as a daughter of noble blood. By doing so, she'd finally been able to mingle with the residents of Lindworm.

But...

Mmmm, deliciousss! Ammmazing!

Plum was now completely incapable of rational thought.



The sweet, salty, metallic taste of blood might have made a human vomit, but to Plum, it was better than any meal she'd ever had.

"That's quite..." Sapphee's voice echoed in her ears. "Enough."

"Mmph!"

A mixture of saliva and blood gushed from Plum's mouth as Sapphee hit her over the head. She started coughing violently, expelling the blood that she hadn't quite swallowed yet. She hacked and spat, trying and failing to speak.

"Plum! You completely forgot yourself! Doctor! Doctor, are you all right?!"

Sapphee was shaking Glenn's shoulder. He was probably suffering from anemia at that point, so she had to be careful not to shake him too hard.

Glenn held a hand to his head. "Plum...how are you feeling?"

"Oh... I-I'm sorry. I...I don't know what happened... I was in a complete daze..."

"It looks like you sucked up...an awful lot of blood, so I hope you'll be able to control your urges now. You need to rest. Once your wings heal...I don't think you'll be driven by those urges anymore..."

"Doctor?!"

Sapphee rushed to catch him as he lost consciousness, breaking his fall with her breast.

Plum was distraught. She'd failed. This was supposed to be her great Lindworm debut, and instead, she'd injured the town doctor. She looked at Glenn's face, trying to think of a way she could make up for this.

But even just looking at his face...

"Er..."

She could feel her tongue tingle in anticipation of drinking more blood.

“Technically, you weren’t wrong.”

Glenn could faintly hear his mentor’s voice through the haze.

“Considering the potential fallout if her urge to drink blood grew even stronger, and taking the patient’s health into account, allowing her to suck blood from you directly was the correct decision. But you were careless. Your abilities of observations and analysis were lacking. At least you’ll have plenty of time in this hospital bed to reflect on your negligence.”

Glenn had lost too much blood. As he drifted in and out of consciousness, he couldn’t see what sort of expression Cthulhy had on her face.

But he was sure she was disgusted by how hopeless he was.

This was the second time Glenn had been admitted to the Central Hospital. Last time, it had been for overworking himself. This time, it was for anemia.

“Doctor, are you all right?”

It was the vampire, Plum Murdrac, skillfully using her claws to peel an apple. Her clothes were as showy as ever, but her expression showed nothing but concern for Glenn.

“Yeah, I’m okay.”

He was still lightheaded. He’d been in the hospital for half a day, so he hadn’t replenished all the blood he’d lost yet. He could still hear Sapphee’s shriek, and his mentor’s lecture, after seeing the state he was in.

He had a terrible headache and was feeling nauseous—classic symptoms of anemia. He couldn’t think straight, but he was grateful that Plum was here.

“Um... I’m really sorry for all this. You know...sucking your blood until you passed out.”

“It was my own negligence. I’ll be more careful in the future.”

“Mmm... Your blood is just so delicious, Doctor. But I’ll make sure

this kind of thing never happens again.” Plum smiled bashfully.

Glenn didn’t know how to respond. The way she looked at him made him feel like some scrumptious prey. He hoped they’d be able to avoid a repeat of last night’s incident.

“Ah, and this is from my dad,” Plum said, taking out an envelope. The paper was expensive, and the text on the seal was an ancient monster script. The whole presentation was so ostentatious that it made him nervous to open it.

“What is it?” Glenn asked.

“Well, it’s a letter of appreciation, but...”

“But?”

“When Dad writes a letter of appreciation, he always adds in this condescending line about granting one favor in return. Shouldn’t he be more genuinely grateful? He has this vampire pride that makes him act all high and mighty. I hate it.”

“O-oh.”

She’d been dejected the night before, but the Plum that stood in front of him now was the Plum he’d met in the city that first time.

Maybe they were both the real Plum, just one version with her confidence shaken.

“I may be biased,” Plum continued, “but my father’s a good person. He loves me a lot. He said this is appreciation for taking care of me—the webbing and bloodsucking and that. Other monsters would kill for such special treatment. Something about it being necessary to bring a species together...”

“Ahh...”

Glenn remembered his conversation with Hephthal, who’d had the backing of the vampires to assume a position of authority among his own species. Murdrac gave letters like this to people to whom he felt a debt of gratitude.

“Doctor, will you become a great leader of humans?”

“No...”

That would be impossible for Glenn. This letter had no authority in the human realm, where they drove out monsters, and it wasn’t what Glenn wanted anyway.

“Plum, what’s written here... Will your father listen to a request of mine?”

“That’s right. It’s just that most monsters ask for the backing of the Murdrac family. But you can ask for whatever you like. Now, say, ‘ahh,’ Doctor.”

“Hmm?! Mgggu.”

She pushed a piece of apple into Glenn’s mouth. He’d been so preoccupied with the letter that he’d let his guard down. He felt Plum’s hard claw touch his tongue.

“Hey, Plum.”

“Hmm?”

She tilted her head cutely to one side, looking like she was trying to find an opportunity to feed Glenn a second piece.

“Then, since I have this chance, I have a request for Lord Murdrac.”

Glenn had gotten more than he’d bargained for with Plum’s condition, but as a result, he could now solve one of the problems he’d been struggling with.

Lindworm’s harvest festival.

Even though the entire town had been proceeding with preparations, there was a real possibility that it would never actually happen.

However, only a few short days after Glenn was released from the hospital, there was an official announcement from the city council that the festival would go forward as planned.

Interlude 01: Memé's Management Journal (Before the Festival)

“That’s why I want to get better at talking to people. I want to become the best version of myself that I can. Do you get it?”

“I-I get it...”

“That’s why I need your accessories, Memé-chi.”

Memé was feeling nauseous.

The reason was obvious. Plum Murdrac was sitting at the counter of the store Memé managed, the Kuklo Accessory Shop, and she wouldn’t leave.

Memé appreciated that Plum came often and bought a lot, but she also liked to chat a lot. Memé couldn’t work while she was there. According to Plum, she wasn’t very good at making friends. In order to hide that, she dressed outrageously, decking herself out in leather and lots of accessories.

But if you asked Memé, Plum—who hadn’t stopped talking since she came in—had no problem interacting with people.

She was just like the others: Lulala, ever popular; Illy, who talked to everyone and feared nothing except Memé’s eye; and Sioux, who didn’t seem to have a single care in the world. They were all bright, positive women who were skilled at communicating with others, Plum included.

Ugggh.

Memé scratched her head.

What Memé didn’t know was that Plum could speak so comfortably because she admired Memé and already thought of her as a friend. When it came to people she didn’t know, she hid her true self behind a haughty demeanor. The accessories she wore were an important part of that protection, but this wasn’t something Memé could comprehend.

“Hey, Memé-chi, are you listening?”

"I-I'm listening. But I need to finish this."

"What? Something new? Are you gonna put it in the shop?"

"N-no. It's a special order. I have a deadline..."

"Whaaat? From who, from who? What are you making? Is that a ring?"

"I-I can't give out information about special orders! Just go home!"

Memé cried out in her heart for help.

Just then, someone entered the small shop. It was someone familiar to Memé, someone she'd become even closer to lately.

"Hey, there! Oh, look...a new face."

"Arahnia, welcome."

It was the arachne, Arahnia.

She was becoming more and more well-known as a designer, and was recently engaged. Memé looked up to her.

"Oh, mentor?!"

"Wh-who are you calling mentor? I've never taken an apprentice."

"B-but you're so cool!"

Plum looked Arahnia over, taking in every inch of her. Arahnia was confused, which didn't happen often, though it was a perfectly normal reaction to a young woman she'd never seen suddenly calling her mentor.

"Mentor! Mentor! I have so much to ask you! What type of outfit would look good on someone who has trouble talking to people?"

"Hmm?" Arahnia handed a bag to Memé. She must have come to check on how Memé was doing, which Memé was grateful for...though given Arahnia's boisterous personality, she could never say that out loud. "Well, I can't resist fashion talk. Go ahead, ask me whatever you want."

"Oh, thank you, mentor!"

"Stop calling me that," Arahnia snapped, looking disgusted.

“Hmmm. I see.”

Plum spoke frankly to Arahnia.

She told her about how she hadn't left the graveyard city in years, and how she'd come to Lindworm for the first time to visit Memé's shop. She explained how she'd drunk Dr. Glenn's blood because her impulse had flared up, and how she was cured of it. Then, Plum told Arahnia that she wanted to dress up more and become her best self. Finally, she told her how she wanted to get to know everyone in the city. She left nothing out.

“I see, I see. You're a bit clumsy, aren't you, Plum?”

Arahnia glanced over at Memé.

Memé knew Arahnia was thinking that Plum's difficulty getting along with people was similar to Memé's. She averted her eye, feeling awkward.

“Well, I'll save my thoughts on you attacking my sweet man and drinking his blood for another day...”

“Wha? Eek!” Plum shrieked.

Apparently, she was shocked to learn that the mentor she respected and the doctor she was indebted to were engaged.

“Clothes are your most powerful weapon. You can look however you want. You can become whatever kind of person you want to become. They're like magic. Finding clothes that allow you to be yourself is a universal problem.”

“But isn't dressing your best pointless if you don't look good already?” Memé cut in, unable to hold back anymore.

Arahnia snickered. “That sounds like something Aluloona would say. She's got flowers, and she's already beautiful, so why bother with clothes and dressing up? But not everyone's a flower, nor would everyone think that way, even if they were. You don't have much confidence in yourself, do you, Memé?”

“Er...”

“There's nothing wrong with that. You don't need to show off. Plum probably wears the clothes she does because she wants to look hot. If she keeps it up, her inside will eventually catch up to the outside.

Until then, why not dress the part?"

Memé didn't answer. She was wearing the clothes designated by the workshop. In the confines of her own room, she often tried on the dress that Arahnia had made for her. But she couldn't show that side of herself to anyone else. She didn't think it suited her at all.

Yet...Plum was different. Even though they both lacked confidence, Plum was making an effort. That was why she spent so many hours in the shop.

"Now, I've got good news for the two of you." Arahnia pulled something out of the pouch strapped to her leg.

It was a folded piece of paper. On it was the official notification that the harvest festival would be happening.

"Are either of you interested in modeling for me?"

"Huh?"

"What?"

Neither Plum nor Memé had expected such an offer from the legendary Arahnia.

Case 03: An Incomplete Shoggoth

It was official. The harvest festival was going forward.

A wave of relief seemed to wash over Lindworm. Many people were well into preparation, despite being unsure whether the festival would go on or not. They didn't want to let a chance like this go to waste, given Lindworm's history of trade and tourism.

However, judging from the expression on Lord Murdrac's face, he still didn't care for the festival. It was Glenn who'd convinced him, using his letter of thanks to get him to agree to hold a harvest festival in the graveyard city.

"We thank you again for speaking to Lord Murdrac, Dr. Glenn," Molly said, bowing.

"I didn't really do much..." Glenn shook his head, but he was only being modest. He'd met with Lord Murdrac in person to request his approval, after all. The vampire lord had been pale and slender, with sharp eyes and a clever spirit. Since he'd reached out to Glenn in the first place to express his gratitude, convincing him hadn't been too difficult. He wasn't thrilled about the harvest festival, but he couldn't refuse a request from someone he was this indebted to, and so he'd sent a letter to the city council giving his approval.

"I asked my dad, too!" Plum said, webbed wings spread out as she hopped to and fro. Molly and Plum were visiting Glenn's clinic.

"The preparations are really coming along. Progress is now at 67% completion. When it starts, please bring the pharmacist, Sapphee, with you."

"Y-yes. We will attend."

Molly rarely left the graveyard city, but ever since she'd gotten a seat on the city council, Glenn saw her in town more often. Today, she probably had council business to take care of. She also had to make arrangements for the harvest festival, so it seemed she was always busy these days.

“I didn’t realize you and Plum were so close.”

“She followed us here. If we’d known her before, we would have negotiated with Lord Murdrac ourselves. The success rate would have increased by 15%.”

“Molly said she was going to the clinic, so I came with her.”

“The graveyard city manager cannot refuse a request from the daughter of the hotel owner,” Molly said, seemingly exasperated. With her goggling eyes, she looked like a flat-faced doll when she shook her head.

“Doctor, you should’ve just told me about the harvest festival. It looks soooo fun. I would’ve helped you out,” Plum said, spreading her wings.

The wounds had already closed up. Glenn was sure that she wouldn’t have any more urges to drink blood.

“Oh, right! You would have been all for it, huh, Plum...?”

“Of course I would’ve! If I knew, I would’ve convinced Dad.”

“I guess I should have said something first...”

“I’m gonna work on an event with my mentor, Arahnia, and Memé-chi. I can’t wait!”

If Glenn had asked Plum for advice, he might have been able to negotiate smoothly with Lord Murdrac. Either way, he would probably have ended up treating Plum and allowing her to suck his blood, so the result would have been the same. Plum smiled at Glenn, exposing her crooked tooth.

“There’s a chance Lord Murdrac didn’t tell his daughter about the harvest festival on purpose,” Molly speculated. “That way, she wouldn’t get too excited.”

“Seriously? That’s cold.”

“Even if it’s true, we hope you’ll save your family disagreements for after the festival. We can’t risk it being canceled.” Molly looked at Glenn with her goggling eyes. “A wide range of events will be held. Scythia Transportation will provide carriage rides. There will be tastings of the many products sent over from Aluloona Plantation. We have asked Loose Silk Sewing to provide costumes for everyone who enters the graveyard city. This will be a test of our skills as hosts. This is only

possible because of your negotiations, Dr. Glenn. Thank you again.”

“D-don’t mention it. I had my own reasons, to be honest,” Glenn said, glancing in the back.

Sapphee was grinding medicinal herbs in one corner of the room, careful not to interrupt Glenn’s guests.

“Mm-hmm. We heard from Hephthal.”

“Huh?”

“He said that his condition for giving you his blessing to marry his daughter, Tisalia, was to make sure the harvest festival went forward.”

The grinding sound was getting louder.

“When we heard you were engaged to three women, we anticipated the pandemonium that might occur. We thought that you were most infatuated with your pharmacist, Sapphee. However, we are glad to see that you consider all of them important. We’ll be sure to prepare a grave that will hold all of you.”

“Ah ha, ha ha...”

The sound of Sapphee grinding leaves was a veritable cacophony. Plum hid behind Molly.

“Did you come all the way from the graveyard city just to thank me?”

“Of course not. Lady Plum came for pleasure, but we have other work to do.” Molly shook her head. “We have a request. Can you please look for this?”

Molly produced a purple ball, about the size of her fist. Glenn took it. It looked like semi-transparent jelly, but it was solid, like someone had carved a crystal into a polished sphere.

“Oh—this is a funky artefact. Is it food? Do you put it in iced tea?”

“Funky...? This term is not in my database. Lady Plum, we request explanation.”

“Funky means funky,” Plum said.

Glenn looked at the sphere. Was it food? It sort of looked like an egg, or even candy. But it was strange.

“Would you like to try it, Dr. Glenn?”

“Hunh, it *is* food?”

“Its original purpose is not for food, but consumption is possible. If you would like to eat part of us, we are happy to comply.”

“Part of *you*?!” Glenn nearly dropped the ball.

“Yes. Dr. Glenn already has three fiancées. We thought excessive closeness would cause discord. But if you desire to integrate with us so much that you want to consume us...we will consider candidacy to become a fiancée.”

“Fiancée candidates are no longer being accepted!” Sapphee called out. She snatched the sphere from Glenn’s hand.

The object, which was apparently part of Molly, bore no resemblance to her except for the purple coloring. However, Molly was a being from the age of the gods, called a shoggoth. She had the ability to metamorphize freely, fully controlling her shape and texture. In the past, she’d manifested as a parasite in Skadi’s heart, and had spread pieces of herself around the city, which had caused the doppelgänger scare.

Molly had formed her slime-like body around the bone structure of the previous graveyard city manager. This ball was made of the same substance as that body.

“This is in a dormant state.”

“Dormant?”

“It is unable to consume nutrients, so it cannot move or transform, even to a predatory state. It is the form that our dispersed parts take when under dire circumstances. They stop consuming energy and wait to be collected, until the main unit can save them. In this state, all outside information is cut off, so the only way to search for them is visually.” Molly stretched her arm toward the purple ball that Sapphee was examining. Her arm literally stretched, like chewing gum, and she took back the sphere. Then she pressed it against her arm.

There was a squishy sound, and the sphere was absorbed into Molly’s body.

“Ahhh.” Molly’s body quivered, and she let out a seductive moan that Glenn had never heard before.

“Umm...so now it’s back to its original state?”

“Affirmative. We kept that piece separate so we could demonstrate for you, Dr. Glenn. We want to ask you to recover these spheres. Now that the harvest festival is truly happening, we want to be as whole as possible,” Molly said, opening and closing her fist to check her sense of touch. “Ever since taking on this form, we have searched diligently for our missing parts, but we cannot find all of them. With the festival approaching, we need to ask for assistance.”

“Hmm...” Glenn understood what Molly was asking. “I’ll do whatever I can to make you feel better...but as for searching for parts of your body... I think the patrol team would be more effective than a doctor.”

“Our dormant parts can’t be found easily. The patrol team might overlook them. However, we determined that personnel from the clinic would have a high probability of finding them.”

“Personnel... But it’s only me and Sapph—ohhh.” Glenn finally understood.

That’s when the fairies peeked out from Sapphee’s clothing, looking ready to help. They must have snuck in at some point.

“We are sure the fairies can find our lost parts. Please help, Dr. Glenn.” Molly bowed.

“Hey, gimme one of these,” Plum cut in, gazing at a fairy in the palm of her hand.

“Fairies aren’t property. I can’t give you one,” Sapphee snapped back.

They needed to find the purple spheres, or rather, the parts of Molly’s body. However, even with the fairies’ help, it would be an entire day’s work. Glenn chose a day when he expected few patients and closed the clinic so they could search.

“While I’m glad Molly feels like she can ask the clinic for help,” Sapphee said as she strolled along the main road, parasol in hand, “do you really think we’ll find them? I’ve never seen Molly’s parts in Lindworm.”

“She just said to look for things like this...” Glenn pulled out the piece he’d received as a sample.

There were so many things he didn’t know about her, like how she could absorb this object into her body, then reproduce it again. He didn’t even know enough to examine her. Molly had always taken care of her body on her own. She hadn’t once come to him for treatment. Still, he was glad that she was finally getting used to living in the city.

“Let’s have the fairies memorize this shape and search for it.”

“Agreed.” Sapphee suddenly stopped short.

There were people heading toward them.

“What are you doing here? Tisalia? Arahnia?”

“Ohhh, you know!”

The pair joined Glenn and Sapphee.

Tisalia looked off. And she wasn’t accompanied by Kay and Lorna. Glenn asked what was wrong.

“If I stay home, I’ll just have to help with the preparations for the harvest festival!”

“As you should. Isn’t that your family’s business?”

“Yes, it is!” Tisalia wailed, tears in her eyes. “But I’m afraid of the graveyard city. It’s full of g-g-ghosts, and for some reason, it’s always dark. I really don’t want to go. But Father said he wants to take our employees and set up a carriage ride attraction.”

“That’s why she captured me.” Arahnia chuckled. “She made up an excuse that she was going out with a friend.” The fact that she would humor Tisalia, even though she was so busy, showed how much she cared.

“Sure, it’s not the most pleasant place...but it’s going to be set up for the festival! That’ll be fun, won’t it?”

“Not at all! I never want to go back there again! That one time when Sapphee made me follow Dr. Glenn with her, I said I didn’t want to, but she forced me—Mmrgh!”

“You promised you wouldn’t say anything.”

Sapphee was holding her tail over Tisalia’s mouth, but Glenn had already heard too much.

“What? Following me? When? You don’t mean when Kunai was serving as the manager?”

“N-no. I trusted you, Doctor. I was just a little anxious and...and in the end, nothing happened anyway!”

“Sapphee...”

Glenn resolved to be more careful when he was out walking alone. It seemed engagement wasn’t enough to contain Sapphee’s natural jealousy.

“Anyway!” Tisalia continued, peeling the white tail away from her mouth. “The graveyard city isn’t as dark and scary as it was before, but it’s still creepy, and I can’t stand that strange sound! What is it, anyway?”

“Sound?”

Glenn had visited the graveyard city many times, but he wasn’t aware of any particular sound. Sapphee tilted her head to the side, too. Centaurs’ hearing was superior to humans, so maybe she’d noticed something they couldn’t.

“There are a *lot* of centaurs who hate the graveyard city. But my father is forcing us all to participate in the festival.”

“Th-that’s surprising. Centaurs are so strong...”

“Swords and spears are useless against ghosts.” Tisalia sighed. “Kay doesn’t seem to mind, but Lorna is delicate and agrees with me. Meanwhile, my mother is shut up in the mansion, saying she doesn’t want to go anywhere near the graveyard.”

“Like mother, like daughter.” Glenn chuckled.

Even though Tisalia and her mother had physically fought over the engagement, they were remarkably similar. And despite Glenn resolving Hephthal’s issue, it seemed Scythia Transportation still had problems.

Centaurs were known for their valor and dauntless courage, but they also had a nervous side. Glenn had once treated Lorna for anxiety, so he was concerned that the festival might be affecting the broader population.

“Anyway! If I help the Doctor with his work, then I won’t have to go to the graveyard city! And searching for Molly’s body parts is also

helping the harvest festival! I'll help in any way to make sure it's a success!"

"Th-thank you very much."

Glenn wasn't sure this was the best way to help, but they did need more hands. He also didn't want to force Tisalia to go to the graveyard city if she was scared. He decided to accept her offer.

"Arahnia, don't you have deadlines?"

"Things have settled down a bit. Besides, there are plenty of other arachne. I could use a walk around town to muster up some inspiration."

"I see, thanks."

So, Arahnia would help them, too.

Tisalia and Arahnia had both helped the clinic in the past in their own ways. And Glenn was sure he'd need their help in the future. Actually, since they were going to be married, he resolved to start asking them for help without hesitation.

"But the four of us walking around in a group won't be effective. What should we do?"

"You're right. We should split up."

As soon as the words were out of Sapphee's mouth, all the fiancées' eyes were shining.

"Doctor, shall we stroll the city together?"

"Hmm. I see. Using work as an excuse to get time with the Doc?"

"You both know the rules? No hard feelings and no cheating. We need to be fair."

Glenn couldn't get a word in.

His three fiancées were clenching their fists, spoiling for a fight. It was a three-way standoff. Back where Glenn had grown up, the common tiebreaker was a game called Frog Slug Snake, but he didn't know the equivalent for Lindworm.

He tried to think of a new metaphor.

In this case, it was a snake, a horse, and a spider. The spider could swallow the horse whole, and the horse could stomp on the spider. But the spider could also use her web to catch the snake and eat it... Well,

that wasn't going to work. Instead, Glenn came up with a new game on the fly.

"Rock...paper..."

The three women stuck out their hands at the same time.

"Whooooa, big winner!"

Tisalia had won against the other two and earned the privilege of teaming up with Glenn. She loaded fairies onto her head, back, and shoulders, and set off into the city. To the fairies, Tisalia—who could easily carry dozens of them at once—must have felt like a moving fortress.

"Now, Doctor, where should we start?"

"Right..." Glenn actually had no idea where to begin looking.

Molly was counting on the fairies. Apparently, they had their own flight paths, and they appeared in unexpected places and at unexpected moments throughout the town. Perhaps it would be best to leave the search to them.

Which meant...

"Since you can carry so many fairies at once, I think it would be best to visit as many places as possible and expand the search area. We can leave the narrow alleys and gaps to the fairies."

"It's like patrol work!"

Glenn didn't think so, but Tisalia seemed to like this analogy.

"Then, can we stop by Memé's shop, too? I haven't seen her since the accident."

"Ohh, let's do that."

The accident Tisalia was referring to was the incident several days ago, when Memé had a run-in with a centaur carriage. Memé had been unscathed in the end, but Tisalia had been left to clean up the aftermath. She was probably wondering how Memé was doing.

Tisalia continued along the main road, her hooves clip-clopping down the street. The fairies would periodically fly off to search, then return to Tisalia's back, or hang from her tail. She didn't seem to mind.

Glenn realized they hadn't walked down the street like this since their all-day date. At the time, he'd had thought it might be his last

chance to spend time with Tisalia like that, but instead, they'd gotten engaged. What a strange turn of events.

As he thought that, they arrived at Memé's shop. Tisalia waltzed in as if she'd been there hundreds of times. "Hi, Memé. How are you feeling?"

"Eeek!"

Memé let out a strange yelp from behind the counter. She rushed to clean up whatever was on her work table. Apparently, she was in the middle of making something.

"Why are you panicking?"

"I-I-I'm not panicking! Next time, tell me before you show up here!" she said, gathering up her tools with a loud clattering. She must have really been concentrating. "W-welcome, both of you. Hurry up and make your purchase, then leave!"

"I'm not one to talk, but you really aren't cut out for customer service..." Tisalia, heir to a transportation company, was appalled. "In any case, we're not here to shop. I'm helping the doctor with his work today."

"R-really?" Memé's eyes grew round with surprise. "You're taking time to...help him?"

"Yes. As his wife—er, as his fiancée," Tisalia said.

"I-I see." Memé seemed to shrink. She was always anxious, but today she seemed especially jumpy. Maybe it had something to do with the project she'd been working on when they came in... Memé wasn't the best at hiding things, so Glenn decided to change the subject.

"Memé, have you ever seen anything like this?"

"What is that? A jewel?" Memé cocked her head to the side, examining the purple sphere.

Glenn might have thought the same thing if he didn't already know.

"Hmm... It's not exactly the same, but I think I've seen something similar."

"Really?"

"Yeah...where was it..." Memé racked her brain.

“You were really busy getting your shop all ready, so even if you did see it, you were probably too busy to remember.”

“Mmm...no, that’s not it. But if I remember, then I’ll tell you.” Memé groaned, holding her head in her hands.

“Yes, please. Well, since we came all the way here, how about we buy something?”

“Oh, thank y—”

“Hmm. Something small for Kay and Lorna...” Tisalia started looking around the store.

Glenn knew nothing about accessories, so he just looked at the products around him, trying to stay out of Tisalia’s way.

“Oh, Doctor, I’ll hurry.”

“N-no, please, take your time.”

A good husband—er, fiancée—would probably have bought her something right there, but Tisalia had no problem funding her own purchases. Being engaged was complicated. Glenn wanted to be as good a husband as he could be, but he still wasn’t even sure what that meant.

He felt something tugging on his hair.

“Hmm?”

Several fairies had climbed to the top of his head. Glenn couldn’t really tell the difference between them, but he got the sense that these particular fairies were around him a lot.

“Found them.”

“There.”

The fairies were pointing at a pair of earrings.

They were handmade, probably by Memé. The bases were silver, adorned with purple stones. It was a rare color for a jewel. But Glenn had seen that same shade somewhere before.

“Ah... Ahh, this?!” Memé followed their gaze. “There were two rare stones in the warehouse, so I used them. I don’t know where the boss found them. But they’re a nice color, right?”

“Y-yes.” The stones in the earrings were each about the size of the tip of his finger.

Glenn had never seen them before, and yet they seemed familiar.

“Oh.”

“There.”

“Found them.”

The fairies kept repeating the same words. Glenn should have realized it sooner.

“Tisalia, we found it. The first one,” Glenn sighed.

“Huh?”

“Er, umm...” Memé was looking from side to side. “I-I don’t really understand. Do you want to buy them?”

Glenn couldn’t ask her to give up a product she’d poured her heart and soul into for free. “Excuse me, Tisalia, can you loan me some money...?”

“No problem. These are Molly’s parts, right? I’ll get the money from her later.”

The earrings, made of silver, cost far more than Glenn had on him. He had no choice but to let Tisalia pay for them. How was he supposed to be a good provider?

“But one small discovery leads to many more,” Tisalia said, looking at the box she carried in her hands.

As if encouraged by the earrings, the fairies bustled about collecting lots of stones after that. They hadn’t anticipated all the different sizes. Some were as small as a fingernail, and would have been nearly impossible for Glenn and the others to find.

“It’s like medical practice. The more data you can gather on observable symptoms, the more accurate the diagnosis becomes. In this case, the more samples we had, the easier it was for the fairies to find them.”

“If we do a loop of the city now, I think we’ll find everything we need.”

“Yes. All thanks to you, Tisalia.”

They’d found the earrings because Tisalia had suggested going to Memé’s shop. Even if she was only trying to avoid working in the graveyard city, she’d ended up being an invaluable help.

“Don’t worry about it. I’m just glad I get to spend time with you.”

That made Glenn feel even worse about his failure as a provider.

“That way.”

“Next!”

“Oh, toward the city council?”

Each time the fairies found another piece of Molly, their accuracy improved. Many people around town had found random parts of Molly and used them for other purposes, the same way that Memé had made them into earrings. The most common new owners were children who’d picked them up as “treasures.” In those cases, rather than just take them without a word, the fairies reported the finds to Glenn and the others. They’d already collected pieces from three homes.

Some had been picked up by harpies, who appreciated shiny things. In these cases, too, Glenn explained the situation and they cheerfully handed over the items. But now, the fairies were taking them to the city council.

The patrol team stood guard there, but the doctor and the lady of Scythia were waved through without a word.

Following the fairies, they arrived at...

“Welcome,” Skadi said.

“Unacceptable, Dr. Glenn! Bursting into the Draconess’s office without an appointment!” Kunai was there too.

“It’s fine. You’re searching for Molly’s parts, right? They’re over there. Please, take them.”

“Oh...”

That was fast.

Glenn had never seen Skadi going over paperwork like this before. She sat behind a desk on which an array of purple pieces were displayed, including the biggest one they’d seen yet. Glenn gathered up the pieces, admiring the size of the collection.

“But...if you had these pieces, why didn’t you give them to Molly directly?”

“Uhh...” Skadi looked away. “They were bright and shiny, so...I kept them for my collection.”

“Collection?!”

“The Draconess loves beautiful things, like stones and jewelry,” Kunai said. “She has a personal collection of them. I don’t really understand it, but she especially likes these purple ones.”

“I thought I’d at least wait until she asked for them back...” Skadi said timidly, interlacing her fingers in front of her chest. “But I can’t keep her things forever. Please return them to her.”

“Yes, of course. We’ll take them now.”

“Ahhh...my collection...” Skadi said, looking at them longingly. “Well, it can’t be helped. I know why you’re here, Glenn, but why is Tisalia with you?”

“I’m helping!”

“I see. So, you ran away because you didn’t want to work on preparations in the graveyard city?”

Tisalia groaned at Skadi’s remarkably correct guess.

Ever since her surgery, Skadi was completely frank with everyone she spoke to. It was completely unlike the stiff way she used to talk, back when she used to hide her face. This was probably closer to her true personality.

“I just don’t get it...to go as far as to scare his own daughter? Hephthal should just give up.”

“B-but my father needs to make money—”

“Yes, I know. But the fact is, there are a lot of complaints coming from centaurs that they sense something strange in the graveyard city. They want something done about it. Still, I don’t know what they expect *me* to do...”

Glenn wanted to help them, but he wasn’t an expert in exorcising malignant spirits. He’d heard Skadi had knowledge of such spells, so he would have thought coming to her was the correct move.

Hmm...

When he’d visited the graveyard before, Skadi had given him a charm to ward off malignant spirits. If the centaurs were afraid of ghosts, maybe they just needed some of those charms?

“Tisalia, if you goof off too much, Hephthal is going to be angry with you.”

“I-I’m not goofing off! I am helping my future husband with this

important work of collecting Molly's body parts for the success of the harv—"

"Okay, okay. I get it," Skadi said, stifling a yawn.

"Um, Skadi?"

"What?"

"I thought you really liked these sorts of social events. Aren't you going to join in the festivities?"

"Oh..." Skadi brushed away the paperwork and laid her face flat on the desk, her horns thunking against the wood.

"The Draconess has prepared a play for the harvest festival," Kunai explained.

"A play?"

"Yes. It is called *Pretty Skadi, the Magic Draconess*, written by, directed by, and starring the Draconess herself."

"O-oh."

"But it was canceled. A majority of the council members opposed it, saying the Draconess would lose face if she staged it and performed in it."

"Umm..." Glenn was aware of Skadi's childish tendencies, but this was a little much.

"Aluloona, Hephthal, and Claudette all vetoed it. Cthulhy was sleeping. I hate all of them..." Skadi swung her tail around in a circle, her head still on the desk.

"Don't worry about it. She's always like this." Kunai brushed aside her anger.

That actually made Glenn *more* concerned.

"The point is that the play was vetoed. But it's for the best. The Draconess is extremely busy with the harvest season. Traders are pouring into the city to buy our crops, and powerful politicians are coming to attend the festival. The Draconess doesn't have time for frivolities. She is planning to attend the festival, but she's left the preparations to the graveyard city manager. Please give Molly our regards."

"Ah, well that's no problem, but..." Since when had Glenn become

a messenger?

Skadi hadn't voiced any complaints about her work, but she might be bearing the weight of responsibilities Glenn knew nothing about on her skinny shoulders. It certainly seemed like it, from the way she'd deposited her head on her desk.

"Draconess," Kunai hissed. "Manners!"

Skadi ignored her. "If Hephthal won't be dissuaded, then things are going to be tough for you, too, Tisalia..."

"Y-yes..." Tisalia's expression stiffened. Glenn wished there was something they could do for the centaurs, but he couldn't think of a single thing.

Skadi just lay face-down on her desk, as if none of it concerned her in the least.

They'd gathered a fair amount of Molly pieces. The fairies were taking a break, sitting on Tisalia as she and Glenn headed toward Lindworm's north gate, where they'd promised to meet up with Sapphee's team.

"I wonder how Sapphee and Arahnia did."

"Sapphee understands the fairies far better than I do. I'm sure they did a great job."

When they arrived, the area was bustling, with many peddlers coming and going. There was a small market where merchants sold crops harvested on the plantation and souvenirs for passing traders to buy. All four of the city's gates were like this.

"Will we be able to find Sapphee?"

"She's already here," Glenn said, spotting her parasol amidst the crowd.

"Oh, my... You can spot her anywhere. I'm a bit jealous."

"Ah, um, uh...sorry. I didn't mean to—"

"Don't be silly. I just hope you can find me in a crowd just as easily."

When they reached Sapphee, they found a familiar face accompanying her and Arahnia.

“Hey, Glenn.”

“Ugh,” Glenn groaned.

It was a condescending face, with eyes that seemed to scorn everyone they saw. For some reason, Glenn’s brother, who was supposed to be in the east, was standing right in front of him.

“This is perfect. Sapphee said you’d be here any minute, so I decided to wait. I’m glad to see you’re in good health.”

“We ran into him over there,” Sapphee said, looking exhausted. She didn’t care for Souen. She knew him from back when she was a hostage in the Litbeit house, but he’d never spoken to her kindly.

Sioux was there, too. She was talking to a woman in a headscarf next to Souen. Glenn had never seen that woman before, and wondered who she was.

“Brother, you’ve been coming here quite often lately. What’s going on?”

“Well, I heard that the Lindworm harvest festival has been revived, of course. It’s rare for this many merchants from all over the continent to gather in one place. I can’t let such a business opportunity go to waste. I brought some envoys from the east to further enrich the economy.”

Souen crossed his arms, laughing. He’d visited Lindworm during the Waterways poisoning as a politician, but this time, apparently, he was wearing his merchant hat.

“Mmm, you look very healthy, Sapphee,” he added.

“Yes, well... I see you haven’t changed at all, Souen,” Sapphee said, inching closer to Glenn.

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“You gotta be careful with this one,” Arahnia chimed in. She was gathering the pieces of Molly they’d collected and bundling them together with webbing.

“Doctor, is this...?” Tisalia whispered.

Souen bowed his head. “I am very pleased to meet you, Lady Scythia. We have the utmost respect for centaur shipping and delivery

services in the human realm. I am Souen, Glenn's older brother. We look forward to maintaining our relationship with your company."

"Ahh, the infamous—" Tisalia cut herself off, laughing nervously. She'd probably heard of Souen's activities through the newspaper. Seeing the way his demeanor changed in front of someone he could make money off confirmed everything she'd read about him. "Please direct any business-related matters to my father. I am an only child, and betrothed to Dr. Glenn."

"Oh, really? I just heard that he's also engaged to this designer here. You've been busy, Glenn. This is unexpected." Souen grinned.

Glenn, who was seriously in love with all of three of his fiancées, was none too pleased to have his brother question his intentions. "Brother...if you're here for business, you don't have time to be talking to us. Go on."

"What's this? From the ingrate who didn't even tell us he was engaged? What will Father and Mother say?"

"Uh..."

That was right. Glenn hadn't even told his parents he was engaged.

His parents weren't prejudiced against monsters, compared to most humans, but he still didn't think they'd be pleased to learn that he was engaged to a lamia, a centaur, *and* an arachne. Especially since human laws didn't allow polygamy.

"Sioux didn't tell them? She's the one who pushed me to get married in the first place!"

"Err...with three candidates to become Sioux's sister, Sioux did not know how to explain to Father and Mother! Sioux is still confused!"

"Well, that makes sense..."

"Your parents don't know?"

"My mother didn't understand, either..."

"Well, that's fine by me."

Each of Glenn's fiancées sighed for their own reasons. Family sure was complicated. Only Arahnia was completely unconcerned.

"You're both impossible. Business is important, but I also need news to take home to our parents. Now, tell me about your engagement

with each of these women, including Sapphee.”

“He’s lying.” The women in the headscarf spoke up. She was perfectly calm, but her voice was loud. “Seeking out merchants was just Souen’s pretext for bringing me here. The truth is that we thought we might be able to walk freely in public at Lindworm. We also heard that there were attractions for couples at this year’s harvest festival. You were a convenient excuse, Little Brother.”

“Umm, and you are...?”

“Allow me to introduce myself.”

The woman removed her scarf.

Glenn had never seen her before, but a pair of short horns just like Sioux’s protruded from her head.

“I am Souen’s fiancée. My name is Saki. I am very pleased to meet you, Little Brother.”

The way she spoke was both sophisticated and gentle, but her gaze bored through Glenn. She’d probably been through a lot, and her expression gave the impression that she never let her guard down. In a way, she was similar to his brother, who never let his true intentions show.

So, this woman was the reason his brother had been so particular about his advancement in life. Souen was working to change the attitudes of the entire human realm for her sake.



“I can see the resemblance between you two,” Saki commented, looking Glenn over.

“Heh. People usually say we don’t look alike.”

“That is not true. You both have strong faces full of unwavering conviction. It’s clear you are siblings.”

Glenn had never heard that before. However, Sapphee was silently nodding beside him, so it must’ve been true.

“Hey, Brother...you brought your fiancée, too!”

“She just tagged along,” Souen said flatly.

Saki averted her eyes. “Is that so? I must have been completely out of line, then. And I was so looking forward to the festival. How unfortunate.”

“Brother, how can you say such a thing!” Sioux cried out in protest against Saki’s feigned tears.

“That’s horrible.”

“To say such a thing!”

“Just awful.”

Souen made a face. “Go ahead. Why don’t you all just yell at me together?!”

Glenn was enjoying himself. It was rare for his brother to express this much emotion.

“That’s enough, Sioux. Here’s some money. Show Saki around the town. I have work to do. See the sights for a while, then take her to the inn.”

“Understood! Ummm... Miss Saki, this way please! First we will get dragon balls!”

“Dragon balls? They’re my favorite. Let’s go.”

Sioux and Saki left together.

Lined up like that, the two demons really looked like sisters. And just like Sioux, Saki wouldn’t be stared at for her Demonitis...not in this city.

Glenn watched them walk away. “Saki seems like a really great person.”

“Hmph. What do you know after saying three whole words to her?”

“I can tell. She must be very patient to be able to stand you.”

“You...” Souen looked like he’d just eaten something bitter. “And what about you? Just how did you end up engaged to three women?”

Sapphee and Arahnia were loading the web-bound bundle of purple spheres onto Tisalia’s back. Arahnia had made friends with the fairies, and was currently chatting them up.

“I-It’s a long story...”

“You’ll have to tell me some time. Just make sure you don’t fight with your wives. Family feuds aren’t profitable.” Strange advice coming from someone who’d been reprimanded by his own fiancée mere moments ago. Souen turned to the women. “Ladies, what do you see in my brother?”

Suddenly in the spotlight, Glenn’s fiancées looked at each other and giggled.

“Do you really need to ask that, Souen?”

“Seriously!”

Souen shrugged his shoulders. He didn’t say anything, but he was clearly perplexed.

“You’re just intolerable, aren’t you?” Arahnia laughed, half-annoyed and half-amused.

Eventually Souen left, saying he had business to attend to. He’d probably meet up with Saki later.

“Tisalia, you don’t have to come.”

“N-no! I’m the one who said I would help! I-I’m in it to the end!” Tisalia’s voice was shaking.

She was carrying the parts of Molly’s body that everyone had collected on her back. The pieces had been collected in a box, held firmly in place with Arahnia’s webbing.

They were, naturally, headed toward the graveyard city. All they

had to do now was deliver the box to Molly, so Sapphee went home first and Arahnia left to work on festival preparations. Tisalia was the only fiancée left. She felt such a strong responsibility to keep her promise that she'd insisted on seeing this through to the end. Bundled together, the pieces were pretty heavy, so Glenn was grateful to have her along to carry them.

"We're here."

There was a skeleton standing guard at the entrance to the graveyard city, but when it saw Glenn, the iron gate opened without a word. At this point, they were probably letting everyone in.

Unlike when he'd visited in the past, the atmosphere of the district was almost bright. There were lanterns made from pumpkins and gourds scattered about, and flags with images of skulls and ghosts were strung between the trees. The merchants of Lindworm were preparing for the harvest festival in front of the hotel.

Although it was still late afternoon, the graveyard city was as dark as a moonlit night. It wasn't hard to see, thanks to the lanterns, but the atmosphere was disconcerting.

Why is it always so dark...?

The sun didn't reach this place. The thick wood hid the sky, and a strange, dark fog covered everything. There were rumors that the fog carried an evil aura, but Glenn didn't believe in such things. There had to be a logical explanation for the fog.

"Eeek...!"

"Tisalia, are you scared?"

"N-no!" Tisalia's face was pale. "Ugh...there's no point in lying to you, Doctor. To be honest, I-I am scared."

"The atmosphere's different, isn't it? The lanterns have brightened everything up, and everyone is getting ready for the festival. They've cleaned up all the cobwebs, and it's not as creepy anymore."

"I hear what you're saying...but I still feel like there's something behind me. Like...someone is following me."

"But there's no one there..."

Ghosts could get close without showing their form, but if there were any, Glenn couldn't sense them.

“And the sound. This high-pitched sound... I can’t stand it.”

“Hmmm...” Glenn couldn’t hear any sound. The band was practicing in the square in front of the hotel, but that was it.

“It’s fine. I’m just a scaredy-cat. I can admit that. Now, let’s hurry and get this to Molly.” Tisalia sighed, resigned.

Glenn tried to think of something he could do to thank her for spending all day with him. Especially since she’d come to him because she didn’t want to work in the graveyard, and they’d ended up here anyway.

Since the load was on Tisalia’s back, both of her hands were free. Glenn reached over and grabbed one of them, like he was stealing it.

“Doctor?”

“I-I just thought that if we were holding hands you might feel a little better.”

Tisalia was taller than Glenn, so it was almost like she was pulling him along. “Tee hee...” Her fingers were still quivering a little. “I appreciate you thinking of me...husband.”

“Hu—”

“Would you prefer I call you ‘dear’?”

“N-no, I’m just not used to it... Just act like you always have.”

“That’s so cold!” Tisalia giggled.

Glenn was flustered, but at least Tisalia was feeling better.

“There you are! We’ve been waiting.” The graveyard city manager had appeared and was coming toward them.

“Molly. Sorry for making you wait. The fairies helped us find the body parts you requested.”

“You have arrived three hours and forty minutes earlier than I estimated. The fairies do excellent work. We are also grateful to you, Lady Tisalia. We’re glad to see you newlyweds are happy together.”

“N-no, we’re not newlyweds.” Glenn hurriedly released Tisalia’s hand.

Tisalia didn’t look put out. At least, she maintained her ladylike smile. She twisted to retrieve the load from her back. “Here, please take a look.”

“Yes, everything seems to be in order. I should be able to make up for the mass that has been lost.”

Glenn brushed away the arachne thread wrapped around the wooden box. Inside were the semi-transparent, jewel-like parts of Molly. He began taking the purple spheres out.

“Now, we will commence receipt.”

Molly suddenly opened her nun’s habit, exposing her chest. Her breasts jiggled. Unlike humans, her flesh was translucent tissue that revealed the bones within. Glenn knew as much already, but it was still shocking to suddenly see it.

She began to press the spheres they’d collected into her chest. The pieces sank back into her body with a sucking sound.

“Mmm. It feels nice. I will keep going.”

Squelch.

Slurp.

The spheres assimilated into Molly’s body. As far as Glenn could tell, nothing had changed, but Molly probably felt something.

“It’s so... Umm...” Tisalia was dumbfounded. “Molly’s body...is strange.”

“Yes. I don’t understand it. It’s clearly not the same as slimes, though it superficially resembles them...and it’s from the age of the gods, which we know nothing about.”

“Having to examine so many different beings... Your work is really difficult, Doctor. I’m impressed.”

“Thank you,” Glenn said, although he hadn’t done anything for Molly. She probably needed a doctor the least of anyone in Lindworm.

“Mmmm...”

“Hmm?”

Just then, a strange sound emanated from Molly. Her goggling eyes opened wide, focused on a single point.

“Mmmgyaaaah?!”

“Molly?!”

Molly’s entire body started convulsing, still making that same strange sound. Her body convulsed like she was being electrocuted.

“Wh-what’s happening?!”

“I don’t know. Molly, are you all right?!”

“Mmm...yeah... Aggh...ahhhmm!” Her voice was still strange, her body still trembling and convulsing. “We’re very sorr... Aggh! Our memory capacity—aggggh—from synchronizing a high volume of information.”

Despite regaining her ability to speak, she was still twitching. Every time she gasped, a spike protruded from her body, as if she was having trouble controlling it. Normally, her expression was so stiff that she didn’t even blink, but now her face distorted as her body twisted.

“Umm...are you all right?”

“The information processing for integration is—mmm—taking time... Dr. Glenn, we apologize... Can you please insert the rest into our chest... Ahhhmm,” she requested.

More than half of Molly’s parts were still in the box.

Glenn thought for a moment. “Molly, if your integration isn’t going well... Umm, well, maybe it’s not a good idea to keep sticking things into you right now? It might just get worse...”

He didn’t think “sticking things in” was the best phrase, but he didn’t know how else to describe it.

“I-It’s not a problem—ahhh! As our cells increase, the volume of information we can process also increases. We should...return to our complete state... Ahhhhhmmm.”

“Oh, ohh...”

He’d never seen Molly like this before. Perplexed, Glenn began taking more pieces out of the box. He wondered if he was right in his understanding that Molly herself was a collection of many small Mollys, and that she could disperse her component entities however she liked. After all, she always referred to herself as “we.” A slime couldn’t do this—it had to be an ancient shoggoth ability.

“Okay then... Pardon me...” Glenn knelt in front of her. After making eye contact with Molly, who’d sunk to the floor, he pressed a tiny sphere into her chest.

“Ahhh!”

It made a squishing sound.

Glenn's hand was sucked into Molly's gel-like body. The cold, moist tissue clung to his wrist. It had a consistency like jelly, and suction tried to hold his arm as he pulled it out.

The sphere easily integrated with Molly's body, so from the outside, it probably just looked like Glenn was feeling up her chest.

"Mmm. We were just shocked from the information overload. We are fine. Please continue..."

"O-oh."

Molly was clearly not herself today. She'd never come to the clinic for an examination, but it wasn't as if she was immune to feeling ill. This was Glenn's chance to help her.

Molly positioned herself to continue accepting her parts. Her eyes were half-closed, and she was breathing heavily. There was no mistake that a change was occurring in her body.

"Continue."

Glenn picked up the dormant pieces of Molly, one after another. He pushed each one into her chest, where it was absorbed with a sucking sound.

"Ahhh!"

Molly's body twitched.

"Mmm! Ahhmm! Ahhh!"

Molly's voice sounded even more seductive than it might have coming from someone else, since she always seemed like a cold and unfeeling machine. Soon, she could no longer hold herself up, and she collapsed onto the uneven, weed-covered ground. This was the first time Glenn had seen Molly so worn out.

It was starting to worry him. "M-Molly?!"

"It's fine. Information processing... Taking time... There may also be a partial change in speech ability. Request to not worry and continue..."

"U-understood."

"Mmmaaahh!"

Glenn pushed the part he had in his hand against her chest, but then...

“H-huh? It won’t go in?”

“Mmm...it’s big.”

This piece was particularly large. Glenn hovered over Molly so that he could apply more strength. Until now, all the pieces had gone in relatively smoothly, but with this one, her body repelled it like a rubber ball.

“Ah, mm, mmm... Unlock, self-synchronization processing is taking ti—mmm?”

Molly’s body twisted at the discomfort of not being able to integrate herself into a single being.

“I-Is it safe for me to force it into you?”

“Mmm, if it’s a part with a small volume of information, it should slide in easily... You just need to find the right spot...”

“I see. Okay then.”

Glenn held the part up to various places on Molly’s body.

He started with her neck. Next he moved on to her chest, then abdomen, trying one spot after another.

“Oh, mmm! Hmmm! Aggh.”

Molly was reacting, but he couldn’t find the right spot to insert it. However, he noticed that the resistance wasn’t uniform across her body.

I think it’s a bit softer here?

He’d found a spot between her breasts.

When he pressed the ball against this spot, it felt like he could push it in deeper. Glenn rubbed the ball on the area, as if searching for the point of least resistance.

“Mmm! Agggh.”

Her reaction has changed...

Glenn nodded. So, the sweet spot was between her breasts. On a human body, that was close to where the heart would be.

“Hmm... I think it might work around here. How does it feel, Molly?”

“Mmm! Th-that’s good. Harder.”

“Yes.”

They were sprawled out in such a manner that Tisalia could only stare, speechless. However, Molly and Glenn were both completely absorbed in their tasks, and didn't seem to notice the compromising position they were in.

"What am I looking at...?" Tisalia asked, but her words floated away in the air of the graveyard, heard by no one.

Glenn was concentrating on getting the massive, rubbery ball into Molly. This was the first time he'd ever treated a shoggoth, but with his experience examining a multitude of different monsters, he was sure that he could manage this.

"It's in..."

"Ahhhhhmm, aggh!"

With a squishy, slurping sound, the ball slithered into the space between her breasts. Glenn's hand was also sucked into Molly at the same time.

"Er...? I can't get my hand out."

"Aggh, oh, mmm...! D-Dr. Glenn, don't move so much!"

"That's easy for you to say..."

Glenn's hand was stuck inside of Molly's cold body. Since she was made of translucent, purple tissue, he could see his fingers inside of her. He tried making fists and spreading his fingers in an attempt to free his hand, but for some reason, the gel-like tissue clung to him. He couldn't break free.

"Th-this... I-I'm stuck..." The suction power of her gel-like body was too strong.

"Mmm...a bug has occurred in our self-recognition function. Our body recognizes Dr. Glenn's body as part of our own. If we don't do something, we will absorb you."



“H-huh?!” Glenn cried out. Frantic, he started pushing away from Molly with his free hand. But the moment he touched Molly, his hand was sucked into her chest, all the way up to his arm. “Aagggh!”

“Dr. Glenn, no...! Now you’ve done it... Mmm.”

Molly couldn’t move. Both of Glenn’s hands were stuck inside of Molly, and he slowly sank into her like she was quicksand.

Am I going to be...dissolved?!

Even though it looked like Glenn was sprawled on top of Molly, this was a serious dilemma. Slimes ate by absorbing food into their body. It was possible that Molly had the same sort of digestive function.

“Ohh...mmm.” Molly writhed in agony.

“M-Molly...wh-what can we do?”

“W-wait... Ahhh. O-our function is recovering...”

Her body convulsed—the integration of all her parts probably wasn’t complete yet. Plus, Glenn was stuck inside of her. It was only natural that she couldn’t stay calm.

“I suppose I have no choice.”

Glenn felt hands behind him.

“I’m going to be a bit forceful. Ready?”

“Huh?! Huh?!?”

Glenn felt a tug on his white coat. Tisalia had grabbed him. She pulled Glenn up, but Molly’s body clung too tightly to Glenn, and he didn’t budge. Her tissues just stretched, instead.

“It looks like we’ll have to pull really hard.”

“W-wait...be gentler...”

“As your fiancée, I cannot overlook this.”

“Mmmm, ahh!”

Molly’s convulsions had grown more violent. Apparently, the pulling was putting additional stress on her body. The more Glenn struggled to get free, the more Molly’s body fought back.

“I’m going to pull again, Doctor.”

“Er, errr...”

Tisalia wasn't interested in Glenn's hesitation. It reminded him of that old tale of the enormous turnip...only in this case, *he* was the turnip.

"W-wait, at least be gentle... Mmmm."

"Okay, here we go. One, two!"

"Mmm-ahhh-argggh!"

There was a loud slurping sound as Tisalia succeeded in pulling Glenn out of Molly, though he was left covered in purplish goo. He lost his balance, nearly falling, but Tisalia was there to catch him. Her face was similarly covered in goo.

"Agggh... Ahhh... Mmm... Oooh!"

Molly was still collapsed on the ground, panting. Her eyes were unfocused and blank. But she was breathing, so she'd probably be all right.

"Th-thank you, Tisalia. You saved me."

"A-all I can offer is brute strength. But now I think I know how Sapphee always feels," Tisalia said, averting her eyes and taking a deep breath for some reason.

"You saved us. We're so grateful, Dr. Glenn. And, well, since we caused you so many problems, we are very sorry."

"N-no, *I'm* sorry that I couldn't do much..."

"That's not true."

All of Molly's parts had been returned to her body. Even the parts that had scattered when Tisalia pulled Glenn out were now back inside her, and the holes in her habit were all filled in. Apparently, that meant that she had all the tissue she needed.

"Hey, Molly? I don't mean to pry, but..."

"What is it?"

"Maybe now you could reproduce the form of the first-generation Molly?"

Molly scoffed. After all of that moaning and groaning, she'd returned to her goggling eyes and emotionless expression, though the latter seemed a bit softer than before.

"We considered reproducing the previous generation, but the results of our simulation were that 87% of our acquaintances would misidentify us. In order to prevent misunderstanding, we have decided to retain this state. Therefore, we will only supplement the missing clothing."

"I-I see."

"As we have already been accepted as 'second-generation' Molly, we have determined it is not preferable to change form needlessly."

This made sense to Glenn.

There were probably still residents who remembered first-generation Molly's form. Glenn had heard that she was a skeleton, so she'd probably worked as a manager wearing nothing but her bones. If that was the case, it was probably better for the second-generation Molly to maintain this form.

"A non-human form is also more appropriate for teasing you, Dr. Glenn."

"Wh-what?"

"Hey! That's inexcusable!" Tisalia cried out.

All Molly meant was that the less human-like she was, the more attention Glenn would pay to her. Glenn was known as a man who wasn't attracted to humans, after all. His engagement to three non-humans certainly wouldn't do anything to squash those rumors.

"The Doctor is already engaged to three women! He doesn't need to add more!"

"I have information that the diva, Lulala, has already reserved the position of fourth wife?"

"Er! Even if that's true, he doesn't need a fifth wife!"

"We would be preferable to the secretary of the city council, Aluloona, at least."

"That may be true, but still!"

Things were spiraling out of control.

Glenn turned away from the pair and looked around. Many monsters were coming and going, busy with preparations for the festival. He could see Plum and Memé over by the church talking, but they were too far away for Glenn to hear. He was glad that they seemed to be getting along.

He also saw centaurs here and there, though there were relatively few, given how involved Scythia Transportation was with the preparations. Like Tisalia, they probably feared the graveyard city's atmosphere.

I wonder if there's anything I can do...

Glenn was starting to formulate a plan. But first, he'd need to ensure that the harvest festival was a success. He looked away so Tisalia wouldn't see his face and realize what he was thinking.

"Anyway! I will not allow you to seduce Dr. Glenn!"

"Understood. I will not seduce. I will only write names on the marriage license."

"Nooo!"

Glenn was oblivious to the argument happening behind him, and the final festival preparations bustling around him.

A million thoughts crisscrossed through his head, like a spider's web.

Case 04: The Cowardly Centaur

The harvest festival was almost here, and the residents of Lindworm were divided into two categories. Half were working on the Aluloona Plantation in the southern part of town and were uninterested in the festival. They were just there to make money. Aluloona hired anyone strong enough to work for her on a temporary basis, and the yield this year was larger than usual, so she was paying bonuses.

The other half were participating in the festival. Various companies and groups were making lavish efforts for the tourists coming from all over the continent, also with an eye to turning a profit. There were also the volunteers who'd be putting on performances.

Molly Vanitas only had one rule for the harvest festival: The living could not, at any point, outnumber the dead in the graveyard city. The graveyard city was home to the undead, even if many of the living had been invited to visit.

"So...we have to dress as the dead, but only on the day of the harvest festival?"

One night, not long before the festival, Glenn was in the clinic alone, looking over the flyer that had been distributed around town. The living were invited to dress as the dead, the undead, or beings like witches or demons. It wasn't mandatory, but Molly believed costumes would make the festival more exciting.

Glenn had promised Sapphee, Tisalia, and Arahnia that they would attend the harvest festival together. Sapphee was off preparing their costumes. Luckily, it wasn't hard to dress up like the dead using the supplies they had at the clinic.

But...

"I want to do something for them."

Glenn couldn't stop thinking about Scythia Transportation.

The problem was that the centaurs were strangely afraid of the graveyard city. It wasn't that Glenn didn't understand what was scary

about it—he'd even been possessed once—but he got the feeling there was something in particular to the centaurs' fear.

“Hmmm...”

He had a small box that just arrived via express delivery, courtesy of Illy. The tag had a shiny seal on it, proof that it had been made by the Kuklo Workshop. Upon closer inspection, he noticed that the seal had had a small weeping eye mark added to it. This was Memé's way of telling him that his deadline was too tight.

“Well, now I need to do my job.” But first, he needed to put the box in a safe place.

Glenn scratched his head. He had an excellent idea for how to solve the Scythia Transportation issue, but if it was going to work, he'd need the help of a number of different people. He decided to start by asking Sapphee.

“Now, if all goes according to plan...”

He hoped it would. Glenn wanted to make sure the harvest festival was a joyous occasion for everyone.

The day of the harvest festival finally arrived.

“Wow!” Sapphee exclaimed when they stepped through the gate.

She'd wrapped herself in bandages and used fake blood stains to make herself look like a zombie. She'd also added huge eyes and a tongue to her parasol to turn it into an umbrella-shaped ghost. She'd put a lot of effort into her costume—possibly with a little help from Arahnia.

“It's packed.”

“Yeah, it's amazing! Everyone is wearing elaborate costumes!”

“Doctor, are you sure you're happy with yours?”

“W-well, they let me through the gate...”

All Glenn had done was stick a fake-bloody piece of gauze over his eye. At first glance, it seemed more like a genuine injury than a costume.

There were some others with minimal costumes like Glenn's, but the majority of the festivalgoers were wearing elaborate ones like Sapphee's. No one would mistake the living for the dead, or vice versa, but the participants were taking the event seriously.

"Loose Silk Sewing sold a ton of costumes."

"Arahnia worked really hard."

Glenn wondered how many projects Arahnia was currently juggling. She tended to conceal any difficulties she might be experiencing, so he needed to make sure she didn't overwork herself. He knew all about working too hard, after all.

The graveyard city was bustling. Many shops and exhibits stood in the square in front of the Deadlich Hotel. There was food for sale, and snacks, mainly made from crops harvested at the plantation. Of course, there were a lot of local Lindworm products for sale, too, including merrow glass and arachne-made clothing.

Various groups were holding events in the ruins of buildings. Those who could fight were holding mock battles or performing military exercises. Those who could sing were giving concerts or performing with dancers. One of the more unique attractions was a group that had turned one of the ruins into a cafeteria.

"Eeee! Agggh!"

A scream echoed across the square. It was a voice Glenn knew very well.

He rushed toward the abandoned church the scream had come from.

"What is it?" Sapphee called out.

Some women they knew were standing in a group in front of the church. One of them was Glenn's fiancée, Arahnia, hands clasped together and a wide grin on her face. Between her black cape, thick makeup, pointy hat and skull wand, it was probably safe to assume dressed as a witch.

"Oh, Sapphee! Doc! We're not quite ready here yet."

"No, um, I think we heard a scream coming from this direction...?"

"Oh, she was just a sore loser."

What was going on? Glenn looked at the curtain hanging from the abandoned church. It read, *Arahnia, Witch Designer: Fashion Show*.

“A fashion show?”

“Right. Oh, I’m not modeling. I’ll be behind the scenes for everything. This witch will cast a spell on the girls to make them change. The models are inside right now...” Arahnia let out a sigh.

So, that’s what the fuss was about. Glenn thought he’d heard a familiar voice, but maybe it was his imagination.

“H-h-hellp!”

There was a loud *bang*, and the first young girl ran out of the church. She wasn’t wearing her normal workshop uniform. Instead, she was covered in frills and lace, making her look like an antique doll.

“Hey, Memé-chi! Don’t run away! Didn’t we agree to change together?”

“No one told me about this part!”

“C’mon, you still have to put on your makeup! I’m not done yet!”

“Eeeaggh! I don’t want everyone to see me like this! It’s too embarrassing!”

Memé finally noticed Glenn. She stopped and stared at him with her big eye.

“Hey... Memé, you look great,” he said.

“Eeeaggggh! He saw me!”

Memé covered her face and started crying. Since she cried all the time, though, no one was too worried.

“As you can see, it’s taking some time to get things ready, but my fashion show will be happening this afternoon,” Arahnia said.

“O-oh.” Glenn was a bit concerned about the model selection, but he *did* think it was good for Memé to get some experience being in front of people, including running the accessory shop.

And it wasn’t like Memé was the only model.

“Doctor? What do you think? Thanks to my mentor, Arahnia, I look perfect! See?”

“But Plum...don’t you think your accessories are a bit excessive?”

“Meh, it’s just for today!”

Even the vampire girl, Plum, was modeling clothing for the day’s fashion show. Her outfit was more rebellious than before, including a lot of pointy bits. Glenn was worried she might pierce her wings again.

“Well, if my wings *do* tear, I’ll just have to drink your blood again, Doctor.”

“Unacceptable. I will not allow such a thing ever again.” Sapphee bared her own fangs.

Glenn couldn’t help but chuckle.

“You make sure you don’t tear those wings again,” Arahnia said. “You don’t want to see me angry if you drink any more of my husband’s blood.”

“Exactly,” said Sapphee. “Thank you, Arahnia.”

Glenn was grateful for the solidarity among his wives.

Plum flashed her crooked smile.

“Anyway...I’m embarrassed to parade around in front of everyone, too. But how else am I going to become the girl I want to be?” Plum cackled. “I mean, compared to Memé-chi’s shyness, I’m actually pretty outgoing!”

Memé whimpered.

“Okay then, we need to finish. C’mon, Memé-chi. Your makeup is going to run.”

“Oooh... Wh-what’s so great about being a model?! You know what? Come at me! Oooh! Are you coming?! Hey!”

“Yeah, Memé-chi, that’s the spirit! Act like you want to blow everyone away!”

“Ohhh!”

The two were kindred spirits...and he wasn’t sure if that was a good thing.

Plum went back into the abandoned church, dragging Memé the entire way. It was a strange form of encouragement. Glenn wondered if it would work.

“Just leave those girls to me. Doc, Sapphee...you go ahead and enjoy the festival.”

“Th-thank you very much.”

“Maybe you should go say hi to the manager?”

“Ah.”

Arahnia pointed behind Glenn, where Molly stood in front of the hotel. She wore her usual nun’s habit, but today, it was embroidered with silver and gold thread. She must have shifted the composition of her body to mimic embroidery in honor of the occasion.

“There you are, Dr. Glenn and Pharmacist Sapphee.”

“Thank you for putting this festival on!” Sapphee bowed her head.

“It is my pleasure. Today, the graveyard city is open to everyone. Hmph. I approve of your costume. Please enjoy the festival to your heart’s content.”

“Thank you, we will.” Glenn nodded.

There was something different about Molly, besides her clothes. Her eyes were closed. In the past, she hadn’t possessed enough cells to form eyelids, but after Glenn and the others had collected her missing parts from all over the town, she’d finally been able to close her eyes.

Although...it was strange that she *kept* them closed.

“I should go greet the VIP guests. Please enjoy the harvest festival.”

Glenn found it hard to get used to the sight of Molly without her bulging eyes. Maybe she was keeping them closed on purpose so that the guests coming from afar wouldn’t be frightened of her.

“Now then...” Molly turned to leave.

“Oh, Molly!” Glenn called out to her.

“What is it, Dr. Glenn?”

“I’m sorry. There’s something I want to do before checking out the festival. Can you tell me where the centaurs are?”

Molly tilted her head, clearly curious why he wanted to know. But it didn’t take her long to figure it out.

“They’re at the northeastern storage shed,” she told him.

“You’re such a workaholic, Doc,” Arahnia said, sounding somewhat disgusted. But Glenn knew that Arahnia always worked twice as hard as anyone.

“Hey, look who’s here!”

“If it’s not the young husband.”

“Please don’t call me that,” Glenn said as he approached the northeastern storage shed.

This was where all the equipment for the Scythia Transportation booth, which offered centaur carriage rides around the graveyard, was being kept. There was already a long line in the waiting area next to the storage shed.

However, the number of centaurs seemed incredibly small compared to the size of the company. Only Kay and Lorna were actually inside the shed. They were drying each other’s sweat, perhaps after getting back from a carriage ride.

“Now that you’re engaged to the Lady, you are *our* master as well.”

“We shall have to call you Master, and the princess Madame.”

“Y-you don’t have to change what you call me.”

“If you insist, Doctor.”

“We will oblige.”

For some reason, Kay and Lorna seemed dispirited. They’d removed their body armor and were wearing costumes with skeleton motifs, suitable for the graveyard city. They also had eye patches, Kay’s on the right eye and Lorna’s on the left. Their clothing was designed to be easy to move around in, undoubtedly for the carriage tours.

“How’s it going? How are the rides?”

“Yeah, well...”

“We’re getting it done, somehow...”

They sighed in unison.

“That sound is *annoying*, and we don’t know where it’s coming from. But apparently no one else can hear it.”

“I’ll be frank. I don’t like it here. It gives me a strange feeling.”

“That’s what I thought.”

The symptoms they described were the same as what Tisalia had told him. Glenn thought that Lorna looked a little less pale than Kay. Tisalia had said that Kay was more comfortable here than Lorna, but perhaps she was just better at hiding her discomfort.

“Here, take this.”

“What is it?”

“It’s a talisman that Skadi made,” Sapphee said, taking out a long, skinny piece of paper. On the front were words in red and black ink. Glenn thought it might be the ancient monster language, but he couldn’t read it.

Sapphee handed it to Kay and Lorna.

“If you stick this to your body, anything evil will be repelled.”

“Well, thanks!”

“Will that really work?”

Kay began to undress Lorna so they could try it out, startling Glenn. But Lorna wasn’t in the habit of hiding her bare skin.

“You’re welcome to look, Doctor.”

“We are your servants, Doctor.”

“N-no, that won’t do.”

They might be right, but even so, it wasn’t as if Glenn was going to *marry* them. He didn’t want to think of how Sapphee would react if he gave in to temptation so easily.

“Well, joking aside...”

Slap! Kay stuck the charm on Lorna’s back like a cold compress.

“How is it, Lorna?” Glenn asked.

“Hmm...it’s fine. No...wait, huh?” Lorna looked around. “The strange feeling isn’t so bad anymore.”

“Really? Do me, do me!”

Kay took off her top, too. It was possible they were trying to strip in front of Glenn on purpose. He was flustered.

“Okay, here you are, Kay.”

“Hmm. You’re right, the strange feeling is...gone?”

“Maybe since the doctor came to this shed?”

“That’s possible. At any rate, Sapphee has a ton of these charms.”

The centaurs were troubled by strange sensations that had been haunting them in the graveyard city. Glenn had prepared a large number of talismans, based on a hunch about where the feeling came from—and the best way to mitigate its effects.

“I think you should put them on the carriages, too. I believe they’re extremely effective for warding off evil.”

“So does that mean...?”

“What we’re sensing is ghosts?”

“Yes. Centaurs are very sensitive to such things. You’re probably reacting to fainter presences that the rest of us can’t detect.”

Lorna and Kay stared hard at Glenn in perfect sync.

Glenn let out a deep breath, assuming they doubted what he’d said.

“If that’s true...then this charm...” Lorna picked one of them up. “Why are *you* handing these out?”

“What?”

“Well, when the graveyard district was first made, it was the city council—meaning the Draconess—who isolated the ghosts in here and prepared the anti-ghost fencing. So, wouldn’t it make sense for the city council to hand out these charms? I don’t understand why it’s your job.”

“Err, umm...” Glenn laughed, unsure what he should say. “Anyway, I guarantee these charms are effective. Just...don’t tell Tisalia what’s causing the strange feeling.”

“Ahhh...”

“I see.”

Kay and Lorna nodded.

“The princess is a scaredy-cat.”

“It’s better if she doesn’t know about the ghosts.”

“Yes.” Glenn chuckled again.

“For now, we will distribute these to our friends.”

“And put them on the carriages.”

“Thank you very much. Oh, where is Tisalia?”

“She just took a carriage out.”

“She will be back very soon. Please wait here for her.”

Once they’d both fixed their clothes, they left the storage shed. Glenn and Sapphee, alone once more, each let out a sigh.

“Kay and Lorna can’t be fooled.”

“Yes, but as long as they tell everyone that Skadi made those, that should be enough. The power of suggestion can be very effective.”

“I hope you’re right.”

That left Tisalia...who was pulling a carriage around the graveyard city right now. Tisalia had a strong sense of responsibility. No matter how much the area frightened her, she would never neglect her work.

“Anyway, Kay and the others should be able to work as long as they have the charms.”

“Yes. Skadi’s name is very powerful.”

The Draconess had only written the first one. Glenn and Sapphee had used it as reference to make a bunch of copies. They were good enough imitations to be convincing, but they didn’t actually ward off ghosts...which wasn’t to say they weren’t effective, though. The true cause of the centaurs’ anxiety was something else entirely.

“Kay, Lorna, I’m back—oh, Doctor.” Tisalia came in, wiping off sweat.

“We’re here with solutions for Scythia Transportation,” Sapphee said.

“Right. I, uh...” Glenn stammered. “Well, this will be my wife’s company someday, so...I thought that I wanted to help, if I could.”

“Doctor...” Tisalia stared hard at Glenn, her cheeks flushed.

Glenn flushed as well. He might be awkward at times, but his feelings were true.

“Okay, okay, okay! That’s enough flirting. The doctor came for treatment.”

“Oh, yes, I know.”

Sapphee had taken out the necessary items while Glenn wasn’t

looking. They were ink pots. Two of them, one black and one red. She also produced a brush.

“I’m sorry, but the charms have all been distributed. We don’t have one for you, Tisalia.”

“Sorry?”

“Instead, we will write the incantation for warding off evil directly on your skin.”

“Wh-what are you talking about?!” Tisalia cried out.

“I’m sorry, but we didn’t prepare enough charms—”

“N-no, I mean...directly?! You’re going to write on me?! Will that even work?”

Glenn nodded. “It will ward off evil.”

“P-please excuse me, but...Doctor, sorcery is *not* your area of expertise!”

“Skadi taught me the incantations. I won’t be using any sorcery. All I’m doing is writing words with ink.”

“I-I see...” Tisalia finally accepted what they were saying.

Residents of Lindworm were all over the place when it came to literacy. Thanks to the town paper and public reports from the city council, most residents could read print. But when it came to writing by hand, or reading handwritten text, the lack of education facilities in Lindworm meant only a privileged few were proficient. Illy, who’d grown up in the slums, and Lulala, who was too poor to afford an education, might be able to read, but they almost certainly couldn’t write.

Glenn, however, could. He was literate not only in the common tongue of the continent and the script used in the human realm, but he could also write the ancient text that he’d learned from Skadi—even if it was just imitation.

Although he’d never expected it to come in handy in this way.

“Please remove your clothing so we can write it on your skin.”

“Uuhh... I never thought something like this would happen.”

“We don’t *need* to do it,” Sapphee said.

“Preposterous. If it will allow me to do my work, then I need it.

Perhaps if it were another doctor, I'd reconsider, but it's Dr. Glenn."

"You have such a strong sense of responsibility. Now then, Doctor, please begin."

Glenn picked up the brush Sapphee had prepared. Meanwhile, Tisalia removed the black clothing she was wearing—fitting for the graveyard ambience—exposing her firm warrior's muscles.

She covered her abundant chest with both hands, but her breasts were too large to be effectively hidden. In fact, holding them down enhanced their bounce.

"D-Doctor, please hurry."

"O-oh. Tisalia, I thought you didn't mind your body being exposed."

"Undressing makes me embarrassed! And even if you *are* my fiancé, being seen half-naked in front of a gentleman I admire...is..."

"I-Is that right?" Now Glenn felt embarrassed. He made a conscious effort to not pay attention to the stark nakedness of her upper half, and instead concentrated on the task at hand.

First, he would use black ink. He touched the tip of the brush to the nape of Tisalia's neck.

"Ahhhhmm!"

"Oh, is it cold?"

"I-It's more ticklish, than cold..."

Each time the brush, wet with ink, touched Tisalia's skin, her shoulders trembled.

"This is a high-quality brush made from horsehair."

"Y-you should just write more forcefully, Doctor! The soft... touch...tickles me...ahhmm!"

"I'm sorry. I need the letters to be legible, so I can't press too hard."

"I-I see."

Being ticklish was pretty typical of Tisalia. However, the ancient monster characters required many brushstrokes, and if he didn't write carefully, the lines would run together.

"Mmmannn!"

“Um, Tisalia, it’s hard to write when you’re wiggling around.”

“Ahhh, I can’t help it...!” Her face was bright red. “Mmm, ooh, ahhh.”

“Okay... I’m going to move down lower.”

“N-neeigh!”

Tisalia timidly removed the rest of her gear, with Sapphee lending a hand. The saddle was difficult to remove on her own, but once it was gone, it revealed the bottom half of her body, covered in black fur.

“D-Doctor, please don’t look too closely.” Tisalia skillfully covered the area around her rear with her tail. It was effective, but also seductive in its own right.

“Don’t worry. I’ll write the text here now.”

“Y-yes please... N-neigh!”

This time, he used the red ink to write on Tisalia’s body. He did his best to make sure the text wouldn’t be visible while she was wearing clothes.

“Mmm... Ooh, aahmmm...!”

“Please hold still.”

“I can’t help it...”

Her ears and tail were trembling, and she was biting her tongue to hold back her reaction.

Glenn drew lines, as if tracing her back. It wasn’t possible for him to write without slipping a little, but he did his best to make sure each stroke was accurate.

“Mm, oh, mmm!” She was doing everything she could to keep from squirming. “Ahh, mmm, D-Doctor...um?”

“Yes, what is it?”

“Will writing these things on my body...really be effective?”

Glenn tilted his head to the side, wondering why she doubted him. Then he realized that they didn’t have the same folk tales here that he’d grown up with.

“Tisalia, the truth is, this treatment comes from a fairy tale.”

“Huh?! A fairy tale...?”

“Yes. In it, a blind priest is haunted by a ghost. He’s called to a ghost party every single night. When another priest hears about this, he writes incantations against evil all over his body. They cover every single inch of him.”

“Oh, ohh...?”

“The blind priest tricks the ghosts with the writing, but he forgets to write the incantations on his ears, so the ghosts—”

“Eee?!” Tisalia’s entire body was shaking.

Damn. Glenn had forgotten that Tisalia didn’t like scary stories. It was just a fairy tale to him, but it was probably pretty scary to someone who’d never heard it before.

“I hate scary stories!” Tisalia grabbed Sapphee’s tail, hugging it tight to her like a pillow. She squeezed her eyes closed just as tightly.

“S-Sapphee, don’t get mad at her.”

“Don’t worry, I’m not. Her high body temperature feels nice.”

Sapphee was perfectly calm, even though her tail was being squeezed. Tisalia was extremely strong, but Sapphee’s tail was basically one solid mass of muscle, so it probably wasn’t a big deal for her.

“Anyway, we have stories like that in the east, so we use them as reference for warding off evil. That was also the basis for Skadi teaching me these incantations.”

“O-oh, I see... Ahhh.”

Glenn’s brush had now moved from her back to her waist. Tisalia’s waist was the border between her human skin and her horsehair. The red ink stained her white skin.

“Ahhh... Neeeeigh!” Tisalia’s body continued to twitch.

“Mmm-ahh... D-Doctor, aren’t you done yet...?”

“Almost. Just a little more.”

“Ahhm, ahhh... D-Doctor, please hurry and finish... I can’t take anymore...”

Tisalia now had thin, black and red text written on the nape of her neck, her back, and the less curvy parts of her body. The continuous brushing sensation on her skin had made her start to breathe heavily. Glenn also wasn’t a fan of being tickled, so he knew how she felt.

“We just have the stomach left.”

“St-stomach?!”

“Yes, umm... I need to write on your abdomen.”

Tisalia’s eyes darted this way and that, as if she was trying to find her bearings.

“You showed off your stomach before,” Sapphee said, eyes scornful.

“I-I haven’t done so since my engagement! A-and this is an entirely different atmosphere! It’s not romantic at all!”

“What are you talking about? This is treatment. Medical treatment.”

“E-errr...”

Tears formed in Tisalia’s eyes, but she brought herself to face the doctor. He could see her defined abdominal muscles. They seemed even more rock solid than when he’d last examined her. He was impressed. He’d heard it was very difficult to develop toned abs.

“Now then, please excuse me. Umm...here I need to draw a pattern, not text,” Glenn said, applying the brush.

“Mmm... Ahnnn!” When he ran his brush over her abs, Tisalia let out a high-pitched shriek. “Neeeeigh!”

“Please hold still,” Glenn said calmly as he concentrated on his drawing.

“D-Doctor, I-I can’t there... N-neeeigh...!” Tisalia looked like she was about to burst at any moment. She’d started out by grabbing on to Sapphee’s tail, but at some point the tables had turned, and now Sapphee was using her tail to hold Tisalia in place.

Glenn began to notice a thumping sound and realized it was Tisalia kicking her hoof against the ground, unable to stand the sensation. But, thanks to Sapphee’s restraints, his writing was progressing well.

“Mmm...! Ahhh... Aaammm!”

He drew a circle in the middle of her abdomen and two curved lines around it. It looked sort of like a heart, or an abstract cup, but Skadi hadn’t told him what the image actually signified. Supposedly, it had some deep, sorcerous meaning, but Glenn just hoped it didn’t look

sexual.

“Mmm... Ohh...mmm! Mmm...” Tisalia’s voice grew louder, which made the tip of the brush run off course.

“Ah.”

“Mmm... Aahhh, ohhh!” Tisalia was trembling even more violently than before.

Although Glenn was disappointed at the now-crooked line, he admired his handiwork. The majority of the drawing looked fantastic.

“I’m done, Tisalia.”

“Ahhh...D-Doctor...I hope you know that if this doesn’t work, I’ll n-never forgive you!”

“Don’t worry, we’ll be together forever,” Glenn said without even thinking about it.

“Mmm.” Tisalia’s already-red face turned an even deeper shade of crimson.



The bustling crowds sounded far away.

They were at the very edge of the graveyard city, which was at the very edge of Lindworm. Glenn and the others stood by the outer fence that kept the spirits in.

“The festival is lively.”

“Yes. Doctor, it seems the carriage rides are extremely popular. That’s great news! And it’s all thanks to the charms,” Sapphee said, smiling. It wasn’t the satisfied smile of a physician who’d successfully administered treatment. It was the mischievous smile of a child who’d played a trick on someone.

“Are you sure you don’t want to say anything, Doctor?”

“Nah, I mean...”

“I know, you can’t say it. You can’t say that the anxiety felt by the centaurs is completely unrelated to ghosts and the graveyard and that the incantations on the charms are completely ineffective for warding off evil.”

“No, no I can’t...”

Glenn and Sapphee giggled together. At that moment, they looked more like siblings than a married couple.

“To be honest, I think Kay, Lorna, and even Tisalia care more than the others.”

“You’re right. That’s why they were fooled by our stories about magic charms and incantations to ward off evil.”

“Just as long as they believe it for the duration of the harvest festival.”

Glenn pointed to a spider’s web on the fence, an artistic one in the shape of a skull. Needless to say, wild spiders couldn’t weave webs with such designs. This had been made by an arachne.

He looked down the fence and saw others—skulls, bats, spiders—lined up in the gaps of the fence. Just one example of something only the graveyard city could provide, and why the festival had to be held there.

“Oh, Doc!” Arahnia, who’d been setting up the rich variety of designs, spotted Glenn.

She finished weaving a web with her four arms and tossed it up. At first, it looked like a ball of thread, but it spread out in the air and stuck between the fence posts, creating the image of a witch.

“You’re very skilled...”

“Don’t you make thread images in the east? What’s it called? Cat’s cradle? It’s the same thing,” Arahnia said, as if it was child’s play. But Glenn didn’t believe it was that easy to perfect this skill.

Naturally, these spider webs weren’t just for decoration, either. Glenn was the one who’d asked Loose Silk Sewing, including Arahnia, to put up these webs.

“I’m sorry to add to your workload when you’re already so busy.”

“What? The fashion show is just for fun, and the models do all the real work. I don’t have much to do now that the festival’s here and all the prep is done. It’s easy to weave up a few webs, if that’s what you need.”

She sounded so nonchalant. But Arahnia—and Loose Silk Sewing—had done marvelous work leading up to today. They’d made the majority of the costumes worn by visitors, though now that the festival was underway, Arahnia probably wasn’t lying when she said she didn’t have much to do.

Glenn still felt bad for adding to her workload, though.

“Getting down to business...” Arahnia pointed her finger at the latest web she’d put up. There was a swooshing sound as it caught something. Glenn could hear the buzzing of an insect’s wings.

“Is it true? These winged bugs are what *really* make the centaurs anxious?”

“I’m pretty sure that’s what it was.”

A black bug, similar to a mosquito, was caught in the web.

It was flapping its wings, trying to escape, but the arachne thread was too sticky.

“It’s smaller than a normal mosquito, moves faster, and the sound of its wings is very subtle. We can see it now that it’s caught in a web, but when these bugs are flying around, they’re very hard to notice.

They *are* mosquitos, but not the kind you'd find in the house. They're a new species that have adapted to the environment of the graveyard city."

"Wow, Doc, you know a lot about mosquitoes."

"You have to learn about flies and mosquitoes if you study medicine. They're vectors for spreading disease. In the worst case, their larva may become parasitic. It's not a pleasant thing, but I had to study them."

The insects were tiny and quick. Even though they were mosquitos, their flight patterns resembled those of flies. The one caught in the web was making a horrible noise with its wings, trying to escape its threaded prison.

"I've been thinking about this for a while," Glenn said. "Why is the graveyard city always so dark, even during the day? They say it's fog, but..."

"Does it bother you?" Arahnia cocked her head to one side as she continued hanging spiderwebs.

"Yes. I can't think of any scientific reason a fog so consistent, and with such a dark aura, should exist. So I looked into what it could actually be. What, besides clouds or fog, could block out the sun?"

"Hmm?"

"The fog, in fact, is an enormous swarm of mosquitos that have adapted to Deadlich Graveyard City."

The majority of corpses in the graveyard were treated properly by Molly. However, there were also many undead walking around, like zombies. Not all zombies took care to prevent rotting or practiced basic hygiene—though they'd probably made an effort today, with so many tourists coming in,

"They say that on farms, swarms of migratory locusts sometimes cover the sky."

"Wait a second." Sapphee held up her hand. "Lindworm only became what it is today about ten years ago. The graveyard city was made after that. That isn't nearly enough time for a species of mosquito to evolve this much."

"Correct. These mosquitos didn't evolve. They're likely a species that just happened to find a perfect ecological niche here in the

graveyard district, leading them to multiply so fast that they now cover the sky.”

“Now I’m going to feel sick whenever I look up,” Sapphee said.

Glenn felt the same way. However, the swarm only inhabited the graveyard city. He didn’t think they’d come into Lindworm proper. As long as they stayed put, there was no reason they couldn’t co-exist.

“That’s why I asked Sapphee to mix the ink with insect repellent... although we told all of the centaurs that it was to ward off ghosts.”

Skadi and Molly wouldn’t have allowed any dangerous ghosts to stay in the district. That’s why neither of them had gotten involved with the centaur issue. They both knew that it wasn’t ghosts causing the problem.

“Centaurs are sensitive, so they *noticed* the mosquitos, but they couldn’t find them. Since all they could sense was a faint sound and an uneasy feeling, they just assumed it was ghosts.”

“Aren’t you going to tell them the truth?”

“I thought it actually might be more pleasant for them to think it was ghosts instead of a swarm of insects.” Glenn chuckled. “And since we can’t eradicate the bugs, I thought we could repel them and trap them. At least for today.”

“And that’s why you had us put up the webs.”

The webs Arahnia had put up were already catching the winged insects. She’d asked the arachne at Loose Silk Sewing to put up similar traps all throughout the graveyard. To tourists, they’d just look like special spiderwebs.

“I’m sorry to make you do this when you’re so busy, Arahnia.”

“It’s fine. I want the harvest festival to be a success.” It was Arahnia’s turn to chuckle.

Glenn had needed many people’s cooperation to pull this off. Skadi had helped with the incantations and had written one of the charms, Sapphee had made insect repellent that could be used as ink, and Arahnia and Loose Silk Sewing had made and set up the webs to catch the bugs.

“When I was putting these up, I noticed there are no *actual* spiderwebs anywhere. Do you think they cleared them out for the

harvest festival?”

“Maybe. These insects are probably the main source of food for the spiders in this graveyard.” Spiders could look scary, but they ate harmful insects. That was why Glenn had always been told never to kill spiders when he was growing up.

At some point, he was going to have to talk to Molly about managing these insects, from a public health perspective.

“Doctor, I think that’s enough. The problem is solved, so maybe we can...” Sapphee wrapped her tail around Glenn. The cold tip gave him chills.

“What? Are you two going on a date?”

“Yes. We agreed to walk around the graveyard together. I was so busy preparing the repellent that I haven’t had time to enjoy myself.”

“That’s gonna make me a little jealous.”

“Huh?”

Arahnia grabbed Glenn’s hand. She skillfully wrapped her four arms around him, not willing to let him go.

“A-Arahnia...”

“I did a favor for the doc when I was really busy, too. I think I deserve a reward for all that. Let’s walk around together, the three of us.”

Sapphee’s tail rattled in warning. “Hey! Me first! You said you were happy as his mistress.”

“I need to get my fix at the harvest festival at least. This is an emergency! I can’t just be the mistress *all* the time. I have more pride than that.”

“Even so, I’m first.”

“You already went around with him! That’s how you got here!”

“That was for treatment!”

They continued to argue.

Glenn had made the decision to marry three women. He was prepared to do anything for them. However, no matter how fair he thought he was in dividing his time, he didn’t think they would ever stop arguing. Bickering was part of how Sapphee communicated, and he

suspected Arahnia, too, actually enjoyed her verbal back-and-forth with Sapphee.

He fingered the small box he'd snuck into the pocket of his doctor's coat.

"Hey..." he said, taking it out and showing it to them. They each noticed the seal at once. "There's something I want to give you. Both of you."

"Doctor, is this—?"

"Oh...my, my, my."

Glenn wanted to give his fiancées the world, so he'd done everything he could to make sure the harvest festival was a success. But nothing would make him happier than giving them the contents of this box *at* the festival.

"What...is this?" Sapphee popped the box open. Glenn watched her expression as she looked inside.

It was the look of absolute happiness on Sapphee's face that made him truly glad he'd worked so hard.

The harvest festival was a success.

Interlude 02: Memé's Management Journal (In the Middle of the Festival)

“Eee! Eee! Eeek!”

Memé was inside the abandoned church.

She was too nervous and excited to think straight. She'd run away to the back of the church. The fashion show, where Memé and Plum took turns showing off clothes in front of spectators, was finally over.

“Memé-chi, what are you doing? Are you pretending to be a dog?”

“Who are you calling a dog? I can't stand up!”

“Why not?”

“I-I'm too drained... Eee...! Eeek!”

She looked more like a newborn fawn than a dog.

At any rate, Memé wasn't used to being in front of people. The whole point of the fashion show was to face her shyness and let Plum get used to being in town. But now that it was over, Memé was completely spent.

“Besides, Plum! Who are you to talk?! You were so nervous your teeth were chattering! What about your Lindworm debut?!”

“Er...I-I'm fine! No one noticed my teeth were chattering! Everyone thought I was the cool, silent type!”

“Ergh...you always act like everything went the way you wanted it to.”

Plum's personable demeanor, and the fact that she was a mysterious vampire, made her seem cool. But after spending a few days with her, Memé knew that her “cool” attitude was really just her fear of talking to people.

Memé's teeth were chattering, too. But everyone in Lindworm already knew that she was shy. There was no way anyone would suddenly mistake her for being a cool, mysterious girl.

To make matters worse, her love of frilly, gothic-style clothes was out now. How had this all happened?

“Ahh, when is Arahnia coming back?” Memé started to gag.

“Hey, don’t puke!”

“I’m not puking! I just feel like I’m *going* to puke!”

“Either way, big yikes.” Plum made a disgusted face.

Arahnia had said that if they got all dressed up, they might be able to become the people they wanted to be. But in the end, even after starring in Arahnia’s fashion show, Memé had just reaffirmed her phobia of talking to people...and exposed her secret interests. Plum, on the other hand, was just fine.

Memé didn’t think Plum actually had problems talking to people at all. But neither did she know what to do about her own lack of communication skills.

“Well, the spectators said we were cute. That’s a positive, right?”

“Huh?” Memé looked over at Plum.

“You didn’t hear? Everyone was saying you were so cute and your cyclops eye was cute and stuff.”

“I-I didn’t hear... I mean, I was so nervous, I couldn’t hear anything.”

“Everyone was saying it.”

Memé had never considered herself cute before. She’d been sure that no one would say anything good about *her* in the fashion show, just Plum and Arahnia’s designs.

“Heh heh.” She didn’t even realize she was smiling. “Heh heh heh.”

“Memé-chi, make sure you don’t get picked up by any creepy guys, though.”

“What are you even talking about?!” Memé screamed.

Plum kept her cool. Plum really could become the person she aspired to be, couldn’t she?

But what about Memé?

There were people she admired, like Lulala, Illy, and Arahnia. They were all cheerful and strong and sociable. She envied that, but she

could never imagine herself becoming like them.

Still, she was genuinely happy that people complimented her when she was dressed up.

This must be what Arahnia had been talking about. Even if the outfit wasn't the real Memé, she was pleased to be praised.

Someday. If, someday, she got a compliment like that for being her true self...well, Memé wanted to become the kind of person who could accept such praise with confidence.

"Now, let's change and get some drinks. I'm thirsty!"

"Uh...no, I need to get back. I have to tend to the store."

"What? Seriously? Just take the day off!"

"No, I'm going home. I can't handle crowds."

"It's fine! Who will I hang out with if there's no Memé-chi?"

"Just find someone to talk to."

"I can't. I could never do that! And I don't want anyone to think I don't have friends. C'mon, Memé-chi. I'll buy you a soda!" Plum cried out, clinging to Memé

Memé struggled to her feet.

She wondered where Glenn and the others had gone. She'd just recently delivered his special order.

"Memé-chi, why are you smiling?"

"Oh, oh... It's n-nothing. Hey, get off me! You're going to ruin your cool image."

"Eeek... Memé-chi, you're so cold, but only to me!"

She wondered if the accessories she'd made had reached their final destinations yet. Even if she couldn't be cool, as long as the things she created made other people happy, she would be happy, too.

That's when she realized...

Maybe *this* was the Memé that she wanted to become, even if no one called her cute or complimented her. She could always commend herself for the pieces that she worked so hard to make.

"Fine, I guess I have no choice. I'll go with you."

"Sweet! I'm gonna get peach juice." The vampire girl was

practically giddy.

“Ugh, how did I get here...?”

Although Plum exhausted her, Memé was optimistic that she would be able to enjoy the harvest festival.

Epilogue: The Deadlich Harvest Festival

The carriage rattled down the road.

It was a Scythia Transportation pleasure carriage that toured the graveyard city. It was simply made and only seated two...or just one larger monster.

However, the plush seat was comfortable, and the wheels were high quality, so the ride wasn't too bumpy. Glenn sat comfortably, watching Tisalia pull the carriage.

"Did Sapphee and Arahnia already see the whole festival?" Tisalia asked.

"Yes. They didn't stay long but, it was fun."

After Glenn had seen most of the stalls with Sapphee, they'd enjoyed some festival cocktails. With Arahnia, he'd listened to the band perform. He didn't spend a lot of time with either one of them, but it was quality time. Now he was spending time with Tisalia.

This was another one of his duties as a fiancé.

"How are you feeling, Tisalia?"

"I feel great! I don't hear that strange sound anymore! It's just like you to be able to ward off mysterious things, even in Deadlich!"

"Ha ha ha..."

Centaurs had especially keen senses, so they could hear things even when other species couldn't. It looked like Tisalia's anxiety had disappeared when the sound did.

That was great news. Glenn was still debating whether or not he should tell her the truth after the harvest festival was over. But for the time being, he was just glad that she could work without feeling so terrible.

"Looking at the district with fresh eyes, I can see the beautiful scenery. The lantern lights, the skull and ghost decorations... It's a serene beauty, different from the brilliance of the Waterways."

“Yes, I agree.”

The graveyard city stood on a small hill on the west side of Lindworm, and the carriage track went all the way around that hill. The farther away from the Deadlich Hotel you traveled, the deeper in the forest you found yourself.

The pumpkins and lanterns were lit by ghosts, giving off a gentle orange light in the night-like darkness.

“I’m glad that I could share this scenery with you, Doctor.”

Sometimes skeletons and zombies would jump out to scare visitors, but this was all in good fun. Even though the graveyard city was made for the dead—actually, *because* it was made for the dead—the residents wanted to embrace their natures.

Glenn and Tisalia spied tourists scattered among the trees.

“There aren’t any stalls around here... Why are there so many people?”

Tisalia didn’t answer.

“Tisalia?”

She remained silent.

“Ummm, is that you, Doctor?”

“Yes.”

“You know how, at this festival...there were advertisements for couples? And you see...there are no stalls here, and it’s not a popular spot...but it’s well lit.”

“Yes, but why?”

“Er! Doctor! I can’t tell you that!”

Glenn had no idea what was going on. He didn’t understand why Tisalia was angry with him.

However, as the carriage continued along, Glenn saw a face he knew, and he finally realized what this space was used for.

“Oh, Brother.”

“Huh?”

Tisalia panicked. The carriage swayed, just for a moment.

On the other side of the Deadlich Forest, he could see his brother

through the trees. Souen was standing with someone. It was dark, so he couldn't see clearly, but the figure resembled Souen's fiancée, Saki. Their faces were moving close to each other.

Glenn just happened to spot them through the trees. He squinted to get a better look. They were holding each tightly and pressing their lips together. That's when Glenn finally understood.

"Er!" Glenn choked.

"D-Doctor?!"

Glenn held his head in his hands.

Tisalia stopped the carriage, concerned.

What in the world are you doing, Souen?!

Then he understood.

This area was one of the date spots set up for the festival. Looking around, he could see many lovers, both human and monster, enjoying the romantic atmosphere of the festival, each pair a little set apart from the others.

It was his own fault for being thick-headed.

Glenn was trying to deal with the embarrassment and guilt of witnessing such a scene. His biological brother was kissing someone!

"What's wrong? Are you feeling all right?"

"I-I'm fine. It's nothing." He let out a deep breath.

He told himself to get it together. Wasn't the whole reason Tisalia had given him a ride in this carriage to bring him here?

"Hey, Tisalia...I wanted to talk to you about something."

"Oh, uh... What is it?"

Glenn got out of the carriage.

The fact that he'd seen his brother making out in the forest had no bearing on what he was doing. This was all him.

"I received Hephthal's blessing. You and I are now officially engaged. So I want to become the husband you deserve."

"Oh, Doctor... You're embarrassing me. You already are!"

"My clinic is deeply in debt, and I won't be able to pay it off anytime soon. But once I *have* paid it off, I want us to be officially

married. Please, trust me.” Glenn looked Tisalia straight in the eye, determined.

“But those are just words.”

“Doctor...”

“So...I got you this.”

Glenn pulled out a small box and popped it open. Inside was a platinum ring.

“This is proof of my promise to marry you.”

“What...? This, for me?!”

“Yes. I had Memé make it at the workshop. I didn’t want to be engaged with just an empty promise. I know I’m not perfect, and I *will* cause you problems, but I hope you’ll stay with—”

“Doctorrrr!”

Glenn never got the chance to finish.

Before he could deliver the entire engagement speech he’d prepared, Tisalia embraced him tightly. Glenn was far shorter than her, so she ended up picking him up off the ground. His words were cut short by the pressure of Tisalia’s chest.

“I’m just so happy... I... To think that you would say such wonderful things to me...”

Her tight hug expressed everything Glenn was thinking.

She held him for a while, then let him go. He could breathe again.

“Doctor...I know that you love Sapphee the most.”

“N-no, I have no intention of playing favorites.”

“Well, even if you don’t intend it, we’ll always be able to tell what you’re thinking. You and I will never have as much time together as you and Sapphee. That’s why I’d prepared myself to be content as the second-favorite.”

Glenn felt something warm splash onto his face.

It took him a moment to realize she was crying.

“But now that you’ve given me this ring...I know that you and I can make our own time. I’m different from Sapphee, but I’m just as irreplaceable, and that’s all I need to know...”

“Tisalia.” Glenn didn’t know what to say.

Looking back, he’d always caused problems for her. When Sapphee ran away from the clinic, he’d made her do the tough office work. Tisalia was so proud that she’d probably say it was her own choice. But that wasn’t completely true. Even if it had been her decision in the end, he knew she’d done it for him.

“Like I said, I don’t have favorites. You’re very important to me, Tisalia. I care for you with all my heart.”

“Ohh... D-Doctor!”

“Oof!”

She embraced him again. He let out a strangled sound.

Tisalia, the proud centaur, was crying tears of joy.

Normally, she never cried. Even when Glenn had turned her down, her eyes remained dry. Glenn knew that, so he submitted to her embrace, which felt like a judo hold.

She’d once thought that her tears should be witnessed by no one—not even her fiancé.

But here, in the graveyard city, she felt free to cry.

“You all right, Sapphee?”

Two women watched Glenn and Tisalia from the cover of a tree.

“Why wouldn’t I be? Tisalia’s allowed to be happy, too.”

“Oh, how kind of you! What happened to your trademark jealousy?”

“I don’t need to be jealous. I mean, look.”

The two figures held out their hands to show each other the rings sparkling on their own fingers.

Naturally, Glenn hadn’t just ordered one ring from Memé.

“I received my ring first.”

“Well, I knew he was having the rings made beforehand.”

“What are you talking about, Arahnia?”

“Oh, nothing...”

The shadows kept whispering to each other, but Glenn and Tisalia didn't notice.

The harvest festival was over.

After all that time preparing, it had only lasted for one day. But with tourists and merchants visiting from all over the continent, the profits made in that one day must have been massive.

As Glenn watched everyone start cleaning up the graveyard city, he was overcome with emotion. His three fiancées were off drinking. They'd already started the afterparty.

“I gave them their rings.”

He'd been so nervous.

This was the first time he'd ever bought something like an engagement ring, let alone three. It had been tough to prepare them without Sapphee, who lived with him, finding out. He'd forced Memé to meet an impossible deadline, too.

He'd just known that the harvest festival would be the perfect place to give them the rings, even before he knew if it would happen at all. So he'd stayed focused, even through the negotiations with Plum and the search for Molly's body parts.

In the end, even though he'd helped Plum and Molly through medical treatment, this was the first time he'd worked so hard on something that wasn't directly related to his goals as a physician.

It was all because of his love for his fiancées.

“Doctor?”

While Glenn was lost in thought, Plum walked up. She was dragging Memé by the hand.

“Hey, how was it? Did you watch our fashion show?”

“O-of course you didn't! Tell me you didn't watch it.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I wasn’t able to make it.”

“Seriously? What a waste. And I spent all that time changing. Well, whatever,” Plum said. She lifted her bat wing and firmly took Glenn’s arm. “Let’s walk around the festival together! I wanted to talk with you, Doctor.”

“Huh? Now?” Memé asked.

“Yeah, when else? The festival is ending soon!”

“That’s not what I mean! Just...since when do you like the Doctor so much?!”

For some reason Memé was flustered. Judging by the glances her large eye kept throwing toward Sapphee, drinking with the others close by, she was probably worried about the lamia’s jealousy. Glenn knew Sapphee was watching him out of the corner of her eye.

But Plum was stronger than she looked. Glenn couldn’t resist her when she pulled him along.

“Why?” Plum replied, implying that Memé shouldn’t ask such obvious questions. “Because there’s a very limited type of blood that I can drink. And who knows when I might need to suck blood again? So I need to be good friends with the person whose blood I *can* drink. I could, like, make him my own boyfriend just for bloodsucking.” Plum’s pointed teeth and tongue peeked out when she spoke.

But even though Glenn would do almost anything for his patients, he couldn’t give her the answer she wanted.

“I’m the one who asked Dad to hold the harvest festival in the first place. Don’t I deserve a reward for that?”

“N-no, that was in gratitude for your treatment.”

“Ahhh.” Plum ignored what Glenn was saying and playfully nipped at his neck. She didn’t bite hard enough for any blood to come out, but he still felt a tiny bit of pain.

“Heyyy!”

He thought he heard Sapphee’s scream shoot up past the audible range.

“Oh, no. Hey, Doctor, forgive me?”

“Please control your urge to suck blood...”

Apparently, Glenn had become Plum's favorite food.

"Pl-Plum! This is bad! The doctor has three fiancées! And they're right over there!"

"Seriously? Oh damn! That's bad! Then I guess I'm gonna be the fourth!"

This was getting out of hand.

"You...will *not*...be...forgiven!!"

A snake tail suddenly coiled around Plum's body.

"Dr. Glenn is a very busy man! He doesn't have time to play around with little girls!"

"Eeek?!" Plum screeched.

Sapphee was unfazed and pulled Plum away. The vampire kept shrieking, but she was unable to break free from Sapphee's tail.

"Arahnia! This is your apprentice, right? She needs some discipline!"

"Nah, I don't have an apprentice. But I'll let her know to keep her paws off the Doc."

"D-don't be too harsh..." Memé ran up, crying and flustered. She really was a kind girl.

Glenn had been mistaken. He'd thought that, once they were engaged, Sapphee wouldn't be as jealous anymore. But he now knew she would never *stop* being jealous. Even though he'd expressed his love to Sapphee in the form of a ring, there was still so much about her that he didn't understand.

"Sapphee, don't get angry."

"How am I supposed to *not* be angry about this?!"

"But..."

"The problem is that you aren't angry *enough*, Dr. Glenn!" she spat, and then started coughing.

"You really shouldn't drink when you're angry."

Sapphee had taken a sip of wine that someone had brought to her while she was talking. Plum was still screeching, but she seemed to be enjoying herself, in a way.

“It’s not easy being you, huh, Doctor?” Tisalia asked, looking exhausted.

The festival day might have ended, but the night was far from over.

It was getting late. The tourists were leaving. The cleanup was almost done. Normally, only residents would be left in the graveyard city.

However, there was one person all alone in the Deadlich Forest. It was Skadi, walking through the woods.

There was no one else around. But Skadi, who was a conjurer in her own right, could sense many spirits.

“Welcome back. It’s late, but please enjoy yourself,” she said, quietly. She wondered if the second-generation Molly knew why the harvest festival was held in the graveyard city.

The real reason, that is.

Just as the name suggested, the graveyard city was adjacent to the graveyard. During this season, although most people and monsters couldn’t sense it, spirits who’d already passed on returned to the realm of the living.

The harvest festival had originally been a custom to welcome ancestral souls back from the netherworld. In other words, the festival was a form of worship. There was no way second-generation Molly could have known about that.

What made the harvest festival special was the ritual to blur the line between the living and the dead. They would worship the ancestral souls and soothe them temporarily. Then, when daylight came, the souls would return to the netherworld.

“It was an ancient tradition in the abandoned village that this graveyard city was built on.”

Of course, most of the residents knew nothing about that.

The ancestral spirits that returned were weaker than ghosts. Without the enthusiasm and chaos of the festival, they wouldn’t be able

to maintain their forms. Skadi spoke to each thin spirit one by one, bringing the festival to an end.

“You are very eager, Draconess Skadi. I judge that you finally have some time.”

“Molly...”

The graveyard city manager appeared in front of Skadi, holding a lantern.

She had her eyes closed—a rare sight, and a refreshing one.

“The festival was a great success. It is all thanks to the Draconess and the city council, who granted their permission. This festival is important to me personally as well.”

“Wait a second...” Skadi stopped and looked at Molly with stern eyes. “Who are you?”

“The meaning of your question is unclear. Is it possible for me not to be me?”

“You certainly are you...but *Molly* always refers to herself as ‘we,’ so if you’re going to pretend, at least get that right.”

There was silence.

“Molly, second-generation Molly, is a shoggoth,” Skadi said. “A conglomerate existence that processes many thoughts simultaneously. Her self is one, but also not one. So, who are you?”

Molly, or whoever she was, grinned. Her eyes were still closed, but her mouth turned up at the corners. This was an expression that Molly would never wear.

“Ahh, you caught me.”

“Er!”

“I couldn’t fool you for a moment! That makes me so happy!”

“Y-you...!”

Before Skadi could say anything else, Molly embraced her. Her gel-like body squished up against Skadi’s scales, making a weird noise.

“Molly...first-generation Molly?”

“Hey! I don’t remember ever having ‘first-generation’ in front of my name. This body and name belong to me, though I guess a shoggoth is using it for now. Tee hee!”

“Tee hee”? What are you doing here?”

Like the many ancestral souls that filled the graveyard during this time of year, first-generation Molly had returned. Skadi couldn't believe how cheerful she was, but the way she spoke was unmistakably first-generation.

“I had a really rough go of it. I had to get into the subconscious of the shoggoth all the way from the netherworld and give it the idea of holding the harvest festival, all so I could return. And I could only come back today! This is a rare experience for you!”

She hadn't changed at all.

Despite her light tone, she was a woman of action, and even though she looked like second-generation Molly, they were nothing alike on the inside. She still had her eyes closed, but that was probably a habit she'd had since she was living.

First-generation Molly had been manager of the graveyard city, protector of the graves, hotel manager, controller of the dead...but despite all those roles, she'd actually been an extremely cheerful person.

She pried herself away from Skadi. Skadi tried to shake off all the Molly goo that had stuck to her body.

“Tee hee! It's nice to have some flesh. It's not exactly the same, but it reminds me of when I was a sexy nun.”

“Sexy?”

“I was criticized for being lewd despite being a bride of Christ. For being a messenger of the devil, et cetera. And then I was executed in a witch hunt. It made no sense! Well, at least after I died I had a good time with you, Skadi.”

Skadi was stunned.

After her first death, Molly had come back as a skeleton, then she'd lost all her attachments and later ascended to heaven. But to think that she could just pop back in so easily made Skadi's head spin. Even the ancestral souls that came back during the festival couldn't have lively conversations like this.

Maybe, for her, the line between living and dead was blurred.

“Why?”

“Hmm? What?”

“Why did you work so hard to come back here? I thought you rid yourself of all your attachments and ascended to heaven.”

“That’s right! I wanted to do more for everyone. Back then, I was nothing but a sexy skeleton. I passed because Lindworm was stable.”

Skadi couldn’t figure out what Molly thought was sexy about being a skeleton, but she kept that to herself. Now she was wearing a shoggoth body, which was much closer to the “sexy nun” she’d been when she was alive.

“I just...well, got this feeling.”

“A feeling?”

“That’s right! You know that guy Glenn? I wonder about him. Oh, he cured you of your illness, right? I think about him a lot.”

Skadi tilted her head to the side. “What about him?”

“It’s a secret. It might be nothing, but then again, it might be something,” she said, lifting her hand to her mouth and giggling.

Skadi was starting to grow irritated. Molly’s personality never changed. However, if she was so concerned with Glenn that she’d come all the way back to life...

She needed to take that seriously.

“I understand. I’ll keep an eye on him.”



“Please do. It will really help me out. I’m going to leave a part of my soul in this shoggoth. That way, everyone can see me, even after the festival is over.”

So, first-generation Molly was in the same body as second-generation Molly, and second-generation was...taking over her memory? If the line between the two of them was also blurred, then perhaps that was why the second-generation Molly referred to herself as “we.” Skadi could feel all notions of “alive” and “dead” slipping away from her.

“Are you going to talk to Dr. Glenn?”

“If I tell people that a woman who already died has come back, it will just confuse everyone. I’ll manipulate the shoggoth’s memory, so only you will know it’s me, Skadi.”

“This is ridiculous... Fine. So...you’ll disappear tonight?”

“Right. I have to give this body back to the shoggoth. If I have the chance, I might come back someday.”

“Whatever...” Skadi sighed.

Ancestral souls only came back for one night a year. She knew that, even if Molly was with her now, it wouldn’t last forever. But there were things only the dead knew, and she’d come to tell Skadi about them. As the caretaker of Lindworm, Skadi couldn’t ignore this warning. She’d have to watch Glenn carefully.

“I still have time before the sun comes up.”

Skadi looked at her quizzically.

“What’s been going on since I left? How’s the city? Tell me about your illness!”

“Don’t you know already? From the shoggoth’s memory?”

“A memory is just information. I want to hear it straight from the lonely dragon. Did you cry and cry when I left?”

“I didn’t cry.” Skadi puffed out her cheeks.

She didn’t need to tell her the truth. She didn’t need to admit how happy she was to talk to first-generation Molly, even if it would be over all too soon. She didn’t need to mention how deeply she’d mourned Molly when she’d passed.

“I said I didn’t cry.”

“Okay, okay. I’ll believe you. Now, tell big sister all about it.”

“Don’t treat me like a child.”

No one in Lindworm knew about this, but the only one who could twist the Draconess around her little finger was first-generation Molly. Such was the depth of their trust.

Skadi talked about everything and nothing with her long-lost friend, late into the night. For the lonely dragon, every moment was precious.

The day after the harvest festival, Glenn Litbeit stood at the city checkpoint with Sapphee and Sioux.

“Nice to see you, even if it was short,” Glenn’s brother Souen said.

“Everyone, take care.” His fiancée, Saki, bowed her head politely.

Souen was a public servant, so he needed to get back to work. Glenn, Sapphee, and Sioux had come to see them off.

“Saki, can’t you stay a bit longer?” Sioux asked, taking her hand.

They really did look like sisters.

Saki seemed to have enjoyed herself in Lindworm. The ability to go out with no discrimination was a brand-new experience for Saki, because of her Demonitis. Sioux, who knew how cruel the human realm could be, urged her to stay. But Saki just smiled and shook her head.

“I would worry about Souen. I prefer to stay with him. The festival was very fun. I hope someday we can have a similar festival in the east.”

“Brother Souen, you truly are loved!” Sioux teased him.

With an indignant expression, he said, “And it looks like you’re loved, too, huh?” He nudged Glenn.

“Wh-what are you talking about?”

Souen was looking at the ring on Sapphee’s finger. He patted Glenn on the head, grinning.

“Are you going to tell Father?”

“Uhhh...” Glenn groaned.

“Should I tell him for you?”

“Hell no.”

Glenn could only imagine how Souen would deliver this news.

Even though Glenn had basically run away from home, he hadn't completely cut himself off from his family. Eventually, he would have to tell his parents that he was engaged to a lamia, a centaur, *and* an arachne.

But...

“Doctor?”

“Y-yeah, I know.”

His stomach hurt.

He'd started writing the letter many times, but he still couldn't find the right words. He had no idea how to explain that he was engaged to monster women in a way that his parents would understand and accept.

“What if we take a trip to see them?”

“N-no way. I can't even imagine the look they'll give me...and it's sooo far away.”

“You really have no idea, do you?”

Glenn was confused. Souen had his nose up in the air as usual.

“I already sent our parents a letter saying you'd be bringing your fiancées. You can't refuse. Pick a time and come home.”

“Huh?” Glenn was dumbstruck. “You sent...a letter? Ahhh, what are you doing?!”

“Ohh!” In contrast, Sioux looked excited. “Brother, a trip home! Our parents will be so happy!”

“Th-they won't be happy! I'm going to be bringing three fiancées home! Plural marriage isn't even allowed there. There's no way they'll understand!”

“You just need to hold your head up! Sioux loves all her sisters! You just need to tell them that you're truly in love!”

“Th-that...”

That wasn't the issue. But he couldn't say that with Sapphee standing right there in front of him. Sapphee stroked the naive Sioux's head, waiting for Glenn's answer.

“L-Let me think about it. If we go back, I'll have to ask someone to handle the clinic cases.”

“So, we're going to meet your parents. Let's do it!” Sapphee was on board. She already knew the Litbeit household, so she wasn't nervous.

“Souen,” Saki called to him in a cool voice. “Why would you put your brother in such a position?”

“He would never do it on his own. That's why I had to step in. Hey, stop it! Don't hit me! What kind of wife hits her husband?!”

“This kind.”

Souen's fiancée continued whacking her ill-mannered husband over the head. She probably wasn't striking him with all her might, but it was still made a satisfying *thwack*.

Glenn was so glum he couldn't even enjoy his brother's punishment.

“I'll be there with you, Dr. Glenn,” Sapphee said, taking his hand in hers.

“O-oh, you're right. In that case, I'll do my best.”

Having Sapphee by his side would help him muster up the courage to return east.

Glenn realized that, at heart, he really was a simple man.

Afterword

One autumn day last year...

ME: Hello?

EDITOR: Hello. Can you talk right now? I wanted to discuss something over the phone.

ME (wondering what it could be, maybe a reprint?): Sure.

EDITOR: We're going to do an anime.

ME: What?

EDITOR: Your work is going to be an anime.

ME: Whaaaa?!

EDITOR (HE WAS LAUGHING A LOT): Ha ha ha ha ha!

Right. So, we're going to have an anime!

Seriously? An anime of this niche light novel?

Thanks to Z-ton, Kanemaki, and all you readers who like stories about non-humans, this series is doing well. I find it hard to believe, but apparently, it's true. We're already having a ton of script meetings. I'm really busy. I never realized that making an anime took so much work.

Even though I'm so busy, we're still going ahead with the *Monster Girl Doctor 0* project. More volumes of the novel are in the works, and there's even a manga adaptation! It's crazy. I only have so many hours in the day!

Monster Girl Doctor Zero will tell the story of Glenn's time at the academy. How amazing is that?! Solopip B's character designs are so cute! I love the Kaiko moth girl! I'm not even that big a fan of Kaiko, but the Kaiko moth girl is a monster girl, so I like her.

There's so much to look forward to...but first, I have to write the book. *Pant, pant*. But, to my complete disbelief, I finished Volume 7 in time to make the anime announcement!

I think that the vampire, Plum, might become a *Monster Girl Doctor* series regular. She's much more bat-like than most vampires characters, which I love. Particularly the bloodsucking scene...heh heh.

I would now like to express my gratitude.

To my editor, Hibi-u-san, who's always watching over me. Thank you.

You must be really busy with the anime project. I'm sorry for making you work so hard. (We're in contact throughout three-day weekends.) (What's a three-day weekend?) (I'm writing this afterword over the three-day weekend...)

To Z-ton-sensei, thank you for your illustrations.

I can't wait to see the characters designed by Z-ton moving on the TV screen. There will be a lot of new work for the anime, too.

To Thomas Kanemaki from Comicalize:

Thank you for your wonderful manga adaptation. Please take care of your health, too. I can't wait for an update. Let's go eat once we get closer to the anime release!

To Solopip B, who's working on *Monster Girl Doctor, Volume Zero*:

You have a really tough schedule because of me. I'll do my best to make sure your job isn't too hard. Thank you!

To everyone who worked on the anime:

This is a really special project. I'm sure it was a lot of work, but thank you for giving it your all. To me, animating a single character, the town backgrounds, or even a single rope is an impossible feat... I hope you're as excited about the show's launch as I am.

Thank you to all of the artists who've spoken with me, including manga artists and illustrators on Twitter, S-BOW, the owner of Jingai Only, and the entire staff. Also, my thanks to everyone working at

bookstores throughout the country. Thank you to the *Comic Ryu* reps and editorial staff, and my family, whom I haven't seen much since I left home. Thank you to the proofreaders who find every teeny tiny mistake.

And to all you readers, I am forever grateful.

Next up—the prequel to *Monster Girl Doctor*. You'll get to see young Glenn, young Sapphee, *and* a certain slime. I hope you'll look forward to it.

—Yoshino Origuchi

About the Author, Yoshino Origuchi

After ten years as an author, his work is finally becoming an anime. That's thanks to the support of all of you. Thank you very much. The work is based on a special inclination, but I hope you will watch the anime, too.

About the Illustrator, Z-ton

I never thought that I would be drawing a cyclops girl for the cover of a light novel. But it's because you've kept it going for seven volumes now. Please look forward to the anime!



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